

Crime Without Punishment

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by

ANTHONY HECKSTALL-SMITH



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DEDICATION

To

CHARLES FRY

*with grateful
and
sincere thanks*

By the same Author

EIGHTEEN MONTHS

"The best subjective account of a prison sentence that I have read since the War."

JOHN CONNELL in *The Evening News*

"An Orwellian nightmare . . . courageous and revealing."

CYRIL CONNOLLY in *The Sunday Times*

"A prose version of Wilde's memorable Ballad . . . notable for its objectivity . . . he pulls no punches . . . a book which ought to be read."

The Daily Telegraph

"Interesting, vivid . . . compulsive readability."

The Observer

"A graphic description of prison life in England to-day . . . carefully impartial . . . a document worth reading."

Tribune

"A human and a shocking book."

The Listener

Author's Note

THIS is an autobiographical story in which I have been at pains to attain complete objectivity. If at times I have failed in this almost superhuman attempt, the story may perhaps explain and excuse my failure. It is, however, as truthful as I can make it both in sequence and event. At the same time, to avoid causing embarrassment or injury to those innocent people who were also associated with the leading characters, I have invented a set of secondary characters who fulfil the rôles played by the real people in the actual drama. These secondary characters are not depicted to resemble their prototypes. In fact I have deliberately made them as dissimilar as possible. I do not believe that this detracts in any way from the authenticity of the story, but except in cases where no whisper of criticism could arise from the association, there is not a single living person, other than the leading participants, who will find any likeness to himself in it.

A.H-S.

PROLOGUE

IT is high noon in Jamaica. The heads of the four splendid Royal palms, dominating the garden, are motionless against the fierce blue sky. Overhead, the vultures—John Crows as the natives call them—appear no longer hideous as they float and glide on effortless wings. Below the verandah, tiny humming birds hover before the white trumpetlike blossoms of some flowering shrub, seeming to drill their way into the hearts of the flowers. The East Indian garden boy moves slowly about his work and there is a dark triangular streak of sweat running down the back of his yellow shirt. His copper skin glints in the harsh sunlight. The pair of dachshunds have called a halt to their endless hunt for lizards amongst the flower beds and under the hedges and are stretched prone on the straw mat at my feet. They possess a skill to discover the coolest spot in the garden or house that is little short of scientific, so that now they have placed themselves between the steps leading to the lawn and the open door of the sitting room in a secret draught of their own.

Down in Kingston the heat and the humidity after the heavy rain of the morning must be unbearable. But here, a few hundred feet above the town, so long as one remains still one can tolerate the heat. Moreover, the garden gives an illusion of coolness. It is a pretty garden; less exotic than most Jamaican gardens and not overwhelmed by bougainvillea and those

great flaming red flowers which seem to flourish everywhere in the Caribbean. Here, someone has planted roses and delphiniums, and a herbaceous border lies beyond the lawn filled with the kind of flowers one sees at home in England. It is a restful, tranquil garden. The right setting for the old, rather ramshackle house that is one of the few I have seen in Jamaica possessing dignity. Over a hundred years old, it must have been a staunch house to have weathered the violence of many hurricanes that have destroyed much newer buildings of stone and concrete. But the old house badly needs repainting. Its once white façade is now grey, and the blistered paint flakes from the woodwork so that it appears sadly neglected and unappreciated. One feels one would like to spend money restoring it to its original beauty in the days before it was an hotel and still the home of some rich merchant trader from Bristol, whose slaves lived in the cluster of tumbledown sheds behind what must then have been called "the great house". But now, as an hotel it does not prosper and has but one guest besides myself; a civil servant, who sits each evening after dinner in the rocking chair on the balcony before his bedroom, deflated by the heat and dreaming, one suspects, of a home in Purley. The swarms of tourists to Jamaica pass the hotel by unnoticed on their way to the garish, stucco palaces on the north shore of the Island, or drive directly from the docks and the airfield to the Myrtle Bank Hotel, in Kingston, where there are a swimming pool and three bars—one air-conditioned. Here, at Forest House, for that is the name of the old place, there are no such luxuries. The bedrooms are sparsely furnished and the plumbing primitive and erratic. In the bar, where the tender sleeps most of the day, his head covered with a dishcloth as a protection against the flies, and the wireless throbs out Calypso music, one is likely to find only tepid water in the

plated metal winecooler that serves as an ice-bucket. The piles of magazines on the table in the deserted lounge are all out of date. The telephone under the stair leading to the upper balcony, seldom rings. Its receiver and mouthpiece have faded from black to an odd shade of green and both are battered by misuse. In the dining room the white-clothed tables with their wilting bouquets of flowers stand as sadly forlorn as brides awaiting husbands who never arrive. The East Indian waiters have sunk into a state of tipless lethargy and the freshness has faded from their white cotton jackets. Their clip-on bow ties are crumpled and their sloe eyes lack-lustred with the struggle against the noontide sleepiness.

Out in the great kitchen the fat negro cook and the two scullery girls are chanting a Catholic hymn; a hymn written many years ago by one of my great-uncles, who was a priest. I have not heard it since I was a child, but the familiar words sound strangely out of place as I sit listening to them on this Jamaican verandah. The women contrive to give the simple, over-sentimental melody an eerie, dirgelike rhythm so that one wonders whether they are not mourning the dearth of customers to the hotel. For no passer-by ever stops for luncheon at Forest House. Occasionally, a few people come for dinner; people who appreciate good cooking and have wearied of the insipid American dishes served throughout the Caribbean.

Here and there about Kingston are notices advertising the Forest House and claiming that its speciality is "continental cuisine", and so the few well-informed residents, knowing this to be true, come to dine. But one suspects that there are but a handful of gastronomists in Jamaica—a suspicion strengthened by the emptiness of the hotel's dining room. Yet I have eaten better there than in many of the famous hotels

in Europe. I have eaten superbly tender fillets, magnificent goulash and lenser Kuchen unsurpassed even at Sacher's before the war. For if the fare at the Forest is continental, it pays tribute to Vienna rather than Paris. For Clari is the genius who directs its kitchen and Clari is Viennese.

* * *

Suddenly the dachshunds are startled from their dozings and dash barking down the gravel path to the front gates. Looking up from my typewriter, I see Clari climbing wearily out of a big, blue American car. A thin, almost frail old lady in a long flowered silk dress. She is hatless and over her greying hair she wears a fine-meshed veil that covers her eyes. I watch her walk slowly down the path, rocking slightly on her high heels as though overwhelmed with tiredness. As she nears the corner of the verandah, I see the inevitable cigarette dangling from her lips. The shapeless silk dress, reaching to her thick ankles, is too big for her so that it seems to have been made for a much larger woman. With a shock I recall its pattern of white flowers against the background of grey, realising that when last I saw her wearing it Clari had been fat. But now the flesh under her bare arms hangs loose and her breasts sag. She is an old, emaciated, sack of a woman. As if every step taken is physically painful, she climbs to the verandah, sinking into a basket chair.

"Toni, how old I am!" she moans. "Already I am half dead in this heat. Mein Gott, how I hate this place!"

Clari's accent is not harshly Germanic. It is soft and musical. But when she is sad it becomes a complaining wail. Nowadays, Clari seems constantly sad. But not only nowadays. As I sit beside her in the shade of the verandah, looking out across the garden, shimmering in the burning heat at high noon in Jamaica, I

reflect that ever since I have known her Clari has been sad. Even when I first met her on another summer's day. A day that now seems eons ago, in Florence, Clari was sad . . .

She has laid aside the big bunch of keys and the little yellow bag of small change that she always carries. From the stub of her cigarette she lights a fresh one, inhaling its smoke deeply. Her head is poked forward on her thin, sinewy neck and under her chin is a pouch of loose flesh. Beneath the little veil, the heavy lids are almost closed over her large dark eyes. Her expression is as inscrutable as that of the lizards dozing in the garden.

What, I wonder, does Clari think about during these spells of relaxed silence? Her childhood in Vienna, the farm in South-West Africa, the villa in Florence, the log cabin in the Canadian woods, or the furnished flats and hotel suites in which her life has been spent? Most women, elderly married women, of her age would have wanted a home, travelling only for pleasure or to escape the rigours of winter. But Clari did not travel for pleasure or to escape anything so mundane as a cold climate.

Did she regret her strange, restless nomadic existence? Did she, for that matter, regret anything in her past? Marrying Jupie or giving birth to Peter? Neither of them has brought her any real happiness. In their separate ways they have spoilt her; indulging her moods, pampering her and treating her like the matriarch she has now become.

The rings on her fingers and the pearls round her neck are evidence of Jupie's indulgence. The brooch she is wearing, an amethyst engraved with the family crest, surrounded by diamonds, Peter gave her on her last birthday; her sixty-fourth, she told me.

She looks older than that; a great deal older. But, then, she is sickly and her heart has always been weak.

She sleeps badly and only with the aid of pills and draughts. One wonders whether her heart is really weak, for it has endured much, or whether she is not kept awake by the agony of her recollections. Does she feel shame for the life with which she has been associated—does she feel any stir of conscience for the evil that has been done by her own men—I shall never know.

In spite of everything, I still cannot reconcile the Clari I know with the woman who sat quietly by watching the cold villiany with which those men of hers robbed and swindled and defrauded countless innocent people. I find it hard to believe that Clari could have known what was going on and that they did not hide the truth from her. Yet I know that she was their accomplice. I know that it was she who packed and prepared for those brilliantly-timed departures. It was Clari, the frail woman with a weak heart, who made ready and then sat waiting, even as she sat now, relaxed and confident that everything was organised down to the last detail and once again, while others were arrested, tried and sent to prison—one in Florence and another in London—she and her menfolk would be a jump ahead of justice . . .

The Indian waiter comes out of the dining room, screwing up his eyes against the blinding sunlight. He walks with feline grace along the gravel path and announces that luncheon is served.

Clari has promised me a Vienna Schnitzel. She has prepared it herself.

"It vill be goot," she tells me. "I make it mit the special sauce vot you like. Com, ve vill eat."

She takes my arm and we walk slowly across the lawn. The dachshunds run ahead, hunting in the flower beds and Clari calls them to heel.

"Remember you the liddle dog in Florence?" she smiles.

“Indeed I do. I wonder what has happened to it?”
I ask.

Clari shrugs her shoulders.

“Who would know after so long time.”

There is no trace of feeling in her voice. No sound of regret. For the old woman leaning on my arm has lived for too long in a world without compassion . . .

CHAPTER ONE

I LEFT France for Italy in nineteen forty-nine primarily to escape the hideous vulgarity of Cannes during the summer season. For the past two years I had lived in a small villa on the hillside just below the old Californic Hotel. In spring my garden was made sweet by the scent of the orange and mimosa trees, and a deep red climbing bougainvillea spread itself over the front of the villa, its young shoots reaching above the bedroom windows of the upper storey that commanded a splendid view across the bay to the islands of St. Honora and St. Margareta. Even in autumn and winter, when the rains came and Cannes itself was shrouded in mist, the little villa with its terraced garden high above the town was often bathed in sunshine. I had thought that in summer I would be able to remain aloof from the hordes of visitors that invaded Cannes. But I was wrong. Day and night, they roared up the hill past my garden in their Bentleys and Cadillacs. As often as I descended to the town to do my marketing or to have an evening aperitif, I was overwhelmed by a mob of black-marketeers, tarts, chorus boys, lechers, lesbians, film magnates, discarded kings, expatriated Americans and English, and White Russians and wandering Jews. When I went to swim, I found the tideless surface of the Mediterranean covered with a film of odorous suntan oil. So I fled to Italy. I paused for a day or so at San Remo, which is sufficiently unfashionable in the Riviera's interpretation of the word



to be still enjoyable. Then I progressed, *via* Genoa, over the mountains of Liguria, between the little vineyards clinging bravely to the hillside, and down into the great Tuscan plains. I stopped at war-ruined Pisa, ignoring its silly, icing sugar, lopsided tower, to eat caneloni, washed down with a litre of sharp local red wine that to me seems so much more inspiring than the nobler wines of France, possibly because my palate has been too abused to appreciate those high-bred vintages.

I came to Florence by night. A great golden moon hung over the city. The cypress trees stood up like the proud black spears of some ancient invading army against the indigo sky. The lights of the Ponte Vecchio and the houses along the Lungarno Della Borsa dappled the shallow, now almost stagnant waters of the River Arno. Leaving the car in the square before the Excelsior Hotel, I dodged between the streams of motor scooters and speeding Toppolinas that in the darkness seemed like great luminous-eyed beetles, and came to rest on the wall that runs along the river bank. It is a wall for which I have always had a considerable affection, for it is one of the few places in Florence where one can sit down without having to pay for the privilege of doing so. Another is on the steps of the Uffizi Palace, overlooking the Piazza Della Signoria, but it is neither as comfortable nor as entertaining and it is befouled by the pigeons.

I sat for some time on the river wall, smoking and absorbing the nocturnal beauty of the old city. I had not visited it since before the war and saw with horror that of all its bridges only the Ponte Vecchio remained; the rest had been destroyed. I was to find out the next day that the old bridge of the Goldsmiths' had narrowly escaped destruction when the houses to right and left of it had been blown away. But as I sat on the wall that night, I wondered why while we can raise starkly ugly

memorials to our war dead, we seem utterly incapable of restoring the magnificent old buildings wrecked by the bombs of ourselves and our enemies. There were deep scars across the lovely face of Florence that even the darkness could not hide. Yet, fortunately, they were less terrible than those I had passed on my journey, so that I went to bed thanking God that Florence had survived the worst ravages of war. For it has always been my favourite Italian city. I prefer it to Rome, where the rustle of silken soutanes and susurrous scandals seem to me to form the background music to the Holy City's very life. In Florence there are fewer dilapidated principessas persistently preserving salons. There are no ageing diplomats, nor sibilant young attachés, and no film stars, conspicuous behind their dark glasses and their permanent state of semi-intoxication. In Florence, in fact, there are fewer ruins either architectural or human. Nor does the city reek of sex as does Naples, or with the oversweet scent of the after-shaving lotions so popular with the rich textile manufacturers of Milan. At any season of the year, even in summer when the River Arno shrinks to a muddy trickle, Florence never stinks as Venice does. Unlike Venice, too, it has not completely prostituted itself to the tourist trade.

So when I find myself longing nostalgically for Italy on a dank, sloppy November night in London or under the dehydrating heat of Fifth Avenue in August, or simply when buying a bottle of Chianti in a Soho restaurant at a quite unreasonable price, it is to Florence that my thoughts turn. Florence, with its narrow, winding streets, its grim, almost prisonlike palaces, and its sudden, unexpected little market places, rich with the mingled scents of flowers and vegetables and cheeses. For me there is an endless charm about the city's cool, cellared restaurants where one dines amidst a confusion of noise and a jovial chaos of

bad service. But most of all, I love Florence for the Florentines themselves, whom I consider to be the most beautiful people on earth. Cosseted and buffeted by the troops of occupying armies, they have never allowed themselves to despise themselves in defeat, becoming embittered as the French have done. Your young Florentine may be mercenary, cunning and precocious, but he is always charming. He remains a friendly, gay, good-for-nothing creature with a personal vanity that leads him to deny himself a square meal rather than a well-cut suit. He is the complete sybarite, whose bold admiration of a beautiful woman is deliciously frank yet never offensive. I feel it can be truly said that Florence is a city of Casanovas who are always gentlemen.

Florence, therefore, in the summer of 1949 seemed the natural sanctuary in which to take refuge in my flight from the monster of mammon that stalked the Côte d' Azure clad only in a bikini and gleaming grease. By good fortune, too, my arrival coincided with a heat-wave so that all those who could afford the time and money had vacated the city for the seaside, and Florence was comfortably empty. By day, not a breath of wind stirred among the cypress trees and in the town life seemed suspended in a haze of heat. Only in the narrow, cavernous lanes around the Straw Market or in the vast, echoing galleries of the Uffizi, Pitti and Strozzi Palaces could one escape from the relentless sun.

But sightseeing became intolerable in such weather and I spent my days by the swimming pool at the tennis club, bathing and playing inexpiable bridge with a party of young Florentines who seemed to have nothing else to do in the world other than to enjoy themselves. I came to know them easily when they found out that I was English, and once they had overcome their initial disappointment that I was not an

American and therefore unlikely to be able to afford to pay for their meals and drinks and ice creams at the poolside bar. They were delighted, too, to discover on the first day of our meeting that I was the owner of a Rolls-Royce, Phantom II, with an unusually rakish body and a long bonnet. With cries of joy they piled into it, begging me to drive at murderous speed down the Lungarno Corsini, loudly blasting the horn.

The next day and the day after that, when they were waiting for me in the foyer of the Excelsior, I did not flatter myself for one moment that any of them was in the least interested in me for any other reason than to ride in my car. But they were gay and charming, and they were all called Pete or Aldo or Francesca or Theresa and looked like the young saints and virgins of Bellini and Fra Angelico, which they certainly were not. They chattered away to me in their impossible English, giggled a great deal together over their private jokes and, although I was old enough to be their father, flirted with me outrageously, for all Florentines are flirts by instinct.

In the evenings, we sometimes met in the Piazza della Repubblica, the square in the centre of Florence, that when I had last known it had been named after King Victor Emanuel, and sat drinking our café espresso and listening to the orchestras and singers competing against one another in the cafés. Sometimes we drove up to the Piazzale Michelangelo and stood in the shadow of the Boy David looking down on the panorama of Florence by night, or up to Fiesole, where we sat on the belvedere of the little Franciscan monastery, smoking my cigarettes and discussing such most unsaintly topics as the lives of Hollywood film stars and the marrying habits of Miss Rita Hayworth.

One evening, when my young people had deserted

me in favour of a picture starring Miss Betty Grable, I sat alone outside Gatti's café, drinking iced Chianti and listening to a fat, balding tenor sobbing Neapolitan love songs. I was a little lonely and somewhat bored. The night was almost insupportably hot. Momentarily, Florence seemed a boiling cauldron of noise and heat. The café orchestras blared discordantly. The voices of the rival singers met and clashed in strident disharmony. The very square itself seemed packed to suffocation as though it held everyone in the whole town at that moment. I felt suddenly that I had been too long abroad and found myself yearning for the peace of the English countryside or the quiet of a deserted London street in the rain. It was while I pondered upon my own perversity, that the waiter brought me a note, tapping me lightly on the shoulder to capture my attention.

"Che hai?" I asked, scarcely understanding what he wanted.

"The three gentlemen over there, Senor," he said.

"Grazie," I said.

"Prego," he answered and swept away my empty glass.

I unfolded the note and read the pencilled message. "Why not," it read, "join us for a coffee?"

I felt suddenly annoyed; even a trifle outraged at what seemed an impertinent intrusion. Then I glanced hastily at the three gentlemen the waiter had indicated. One of them, the eldest and the fat one, smiled at me. Obviously, I decided, he was the writer of the note, and my irritation increased. Rather deliberately, I tore up the scrap of paper, placing the pieces in the ashtray. Then I lit a cigarette, probably with an absurdly theatrical casualness, and looked everywhere about the square except where the trio sat. But curiosity had to be satisfied and I took a hasty glance in their direction. The fat man smiled again. I

noticed with distaste that he had a little round pursed-up mouth that reminded me of a roach. His white silk shirt was open and I could see that his breasts were unnaturally overdeveloped and seemed to rest upon the roll of flesh above his stomach.

"Probably German," I thought, and looked away. The blond youth sitting on his left, with a great deal of curly hair which he wore in a quiff, was, I decided, also German and from Bavaria. But the third member of the party, a cadaverous, bespectacled young man, wearing a white shirt, flannel trousers and grubby sandshoes, I placed as being merely a rather nondescript Englishman.

For a while I sat on at Gatti's speculating about the fat man and his ill-assorted companions. Only once before in my life had I ever received a note by the hand of a waiter and that was when I was in my early twenties. I happened to be dining alone at the Casino in Deauville and the writer of the note had been a silly, bridling and slightly amorous old lady, sitting a few tables away, who had mistaken me for a gigolo. Then, as now, I was distinctly piqued, probably because neither correspondent possessed the slightest attraction for me.

Paying the waiter and feeling conscious that he expected a larger tip in his rôle of courier, I wended my way between the closely-packed tables, across the square to my car. A grubby, green-eyed urchin, who might have stepped out of a canvas by Murillo, squatted on the running board, smoking a cigarette. At my approach he rose lazily, and with a conjurer's flourish produced several packets of American cigarettes from inside his ragged shirt, thrusting them under my nose.

"American cigarette, mister! American cigarette! Camels, Lucky Streak—all you want!" In his hoarse whisper he contrived to make the familiar names sound

grossly obscene and unusually exciting. I bought two packets, telling him to keep the change for which he fumbled despairingly among his tatters.

Just as I was getting into the car, a voice close beside me said: "That's some automobile!"

Even before I looked round I knew that the fat man was the speaker. I have always rather prided myself on my ability to place people; people seen in the street, in cafés, pubs and on buses. As a writer and, therefore, a student of men, I extract a smug satisfaction from the fact that I am rather clever in this respect. So that now I was annoyed that this man who I thought was a German now sounded so distinctly American. I turned towards him with the set intention of being rude. The fellow's persistent impertinence was quite insufferable. Had he possessed any sensitivity, my deliberate destruction of his note should have been sufficiently snubbing. Yet there he stood, smiling blandly and still trying to trump up an acquaintance-ship by his fatuous admiration of my car. I saw, too, that the bespectacled young man beside him was filled with admiration at his friend's audacity. In my irritability, I dubbed him a puny sycophant. As for the curly-headed youth, I was only aware that his entire attention was concentrated upon picking his nose.

"The automobile as you call it, is more than thirteen years old," I said coldly.

The fat man laughed, turning to his cadaverous friend.

"You see, I was right. He *is* English." Then he said to me:

"We saw you drive up and come into Gatti's. Ronnie here said you were French, but I knew at once that you were English. You couldn't possibly be anything else," he added effusively.

"I congratulate you on your powers of observation,"

I said. "Not even in Timbuctoo have I been mistaken for a native."

Ignoring such laboured sarcasm, he said: "We decided you were a stranger around here and looked kinda lonesome, so I thought maybe you'd like to come back to my apartment for a decent cup of coffee."

He managed to imply that in Florence, where they serve the best coffee in the world, the coffee in his own wretched apartment was the only kind fit to drink. And he substantiated this blasphemy by adding that he could offer me "genuine Swiss Nescafé". The macabre horror of the man was beginning to fascinate me, so that I mellowed towards him a little.

"That's very kind of you," I said.

"Don't mention it," he answered. Then he held out his hand.

"My name's Gert—Peter Gert—and this is Ronnie Brookes." He indicated the young Englishman. "That," he said, "is Willie. He's Bavarian . . ."

"He's my Secretary," Mr. Gert explained, giving me a quick searching glance. "But so far he doesn't understand a goddam word of English. Do you, Willie?"

At the sound of his name, Willie stopped picking his nose and grinned. He was a coltishly handsome youth, obviously of peasant stock, who would have seemed in his element riding a butcher's bicycle and wearing one of those blue and white striped aprons. I noticed that he had powerful, splay-fingered hands that I could not picture flitting over the keys of Mr. Gert's delicate little portable. But, then, of course one could never be sure.

Mr. Gert asked me where I was staying in Florence and I told him at the Excelsior Hotel. He explained that his apartment was nearby the hotel, just along the Lungarno Della Grazie.

"Maybe you'd better follow me along," he said. "That's my car across the road." He waved casually towards a great red, gleaming American convertible.

"Don't drive too fast or I shall never be able to keep up with that monster," I told him.

"We'll cruise slowly along the Arno. It can be quite amusing at this time of night. Some of the kids are kinda cute," he added with a knowing wink.

As I got into my car and followed the convertible out of the square, I decided that Mr. Gert had an unfortunate propensity to take casual acquaintances too much for granted.

Turning into the Via Torrigiani, he was true to his word and slowed his car to a snail's pace, at the same time switching on its powerful radio so loudly that I could hear its blare from fifty yards away. It was close upon midnight, and the youth of Florence was gathered on the wall as thickly as swallows on a telegraph wire. The two great cars, moving slowly past them, created a minor sensation, calling forth whistles and cries of recognition, directed, I thanked God, at Mr. Gert, who seemed to be on bowing terms with most of the youths. I was relieved when we reached the doors of his house. My host, on the other hand, was obviously delighted at our triumphant progress.

"You see what I mean?" he cried as we entered the house. I did indeed see what he meant, but I made the long climb up the wide, stone staircase leading to his apartment on the third floor an excuse to remain silent.

Once inside his own home, my host became very much its master. In fluent German, he ordered Willie to the kitchen to prepare the coffee and sent Ronnie Brookes to fetch glasses and liqueurs.

"Make 'em work for their keep, that's what I say," he chuckled, throwing himself so violently on to the

big leather sofa that he overturned a nearby occasional table.

"Sit down and make yourself at home," he invited, setting the table noisily to rights. "Take your jacket off and your tie, too. Everyone does what he likes here. No standing on ceremony. Have a cigarette?" He threw a packet of Camels across the room into my lap.

The room showed little taste and was almost cell-like in its simplicity. On the whitewashed walls hung several grotesque African native masks, grinning down at one and showing fanglike ivory teeth. On a shelf beside me were a number of books, uniformly bound in brown leather; Wilde's *De Profundis* and *Salome*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male*, a German edition of Shakespeare's Plays, *Vile Bodies* and several untitled volumes that one sensed were pornographic. There were no flowers and the lighting provided by a wrought iron lamp, hanging from the ceiling, was crudely bright. One had the impression that, apart from the books and the repulsive masks, nothing in the room belonged to Mr. Gert. Without being told, one recognised it for what it was; a living room in a hired apartment, stripped of its individuality and furnished towards a purely mercenary end.

"Staying long in Florence?" Mr. Gert asked.

I said that I had no definite plans, adding that I would probably stay just as long as I was in the mood to do so.

"I gather you're a gentleman of leisure," he smiled.

"I mean you don't have to work."

"You might call me one of the last of the rentiers," I told him.

"Jesus! you're lucky. Fancy having nothing to do," he said enviously.

"By which you mean to say that you're a busy man?" I queried.

"I work like a black. Hardly ever get even a week-end to myself," he explained.

"You work here—in Florence?" I asked.

"Right here in this very town," he told me.

I remarked that he must be the only man in the place who did work hard and he seemed flattered.

"That's why I make money and that's why most of these goddam wops are broke—the lazy sons-of-bitches!" he boasted.

Willie came in carrying the coffee tray, and Mr. Gert's sharp little blue eyes watched him closely as he set the cups on the table.

"No spoons!" he shouted. "No sugar!"

The youth looked puzzled and said: "Plees?"

"Not house-trained!" my host said, winking. Then he started talking volubly again in German.

Whatever it was that his master said to him, it seemed deeply to offend the youth, for he pouted sulkily and, shrugging his shoulders, retired from the room.

Mr. Gert giggled. "Temperamental little bastard! Now, I suppose, he'll sulk for the rest of the night. How tiresome can they be!" he cried, rolling his eyes towards the ceiling. "But it's probably my fault for spoiling him. Anyway, have some coffee," he said, seeming to dismiss the petulant secretary from his mind.

Ronnie Brookes joined us, bringing the liqueurs.

As we sat drinking, I studied Mr. Gert more closely. He could not, I decided, have been much over thirty and, although he was fat, he was not flabby. His shoulders were broad and powerful; his neck short and bullish. One could easily have mistaken him for an all-in wrestler or a weight-lifter. He was a naturally rumbustious creature—lumbering and clumsy—so that the precious manner that he sometimes affected was as absurdly incongruous as the rings on his little

fingers, the gold bracelet on his wrist and the fine gold chain with its oddly phallic coral charm which hung round his neck. Highly nervous and fidgety, he had a slight, but distinct tic, causing the sinews in his throat to contract and his nose to twitch. That he suffered from a sense of inferiority, I felt certain, for his arrogant self-assurance was forced and his bonhomie too welcoming. I was sure, too, that his sex life was a fortuous one. But what puzzled me most about him was his nationality. While he spoke with a distinct American accent, I was convinced that he was not an American. Of course, he was not English.

After one or two kümmels, he grew more expansive than ever and as he talked I detected that he had difficulty in pronouncing his Vs and Ws, while his American accent became markedly more anglicised. Then the telephone bell rang and he added to my bewilderment by answering the caller in fluently colloquial Italian. He must have sensed my perplexity for, as he put down the receiver, he looked across at me and laughed.

"I've got you guessing, haven't I?"

"You have rather," I confessed. "Where *do* you come from?"

"South Africa. But I was born in Vienna. My parents were formerly Austrian," he explained.

So, I thought, I had not been far wide of the mark in taking him for a German.

"What did you think I was?" he asked, looking amused.

Avoiding the truth, I said that I had known he was not English.

He seemed momentarily put out. "Why, do I speak with an accent?" he questioned.

"An American accent," I told him.

He appeared reassured. "That's just too bad. You see, I've mixed with a lot of Yanks and their accent's

catching," he explained. "I must be more careful in future." Then he told me that he spoke six languages and all of them fluently.

Getting up from the sofa, he came across to me with the kummel bottle. "Have some more of this stuff?" he said.

I thanked him and said that I must go home to bed for it was now after one in the morning, and I noticed that Ronnie Brookes had fallen asleep in his armchair.

My host walked me to the door.

"We must meet again," he said. "How about Gatti's to-morrow at five-thirty? My mother goes there every afternoon to eat a cassata. I should like to have you meet her."

"I'd like to meet her," I told him, for I was beginning to feel that this bizarre creature would add to my entertainment in Florence.

He held out his hand and as I took it, I noticed for the first time that had lost part of his third finger. Only the stump below the knuckle remained.

"Until to-morrow at five-thirty, then," he said.

* * *

The night was still oppressively hot and I lay in bed for some time thinking about the curious events of the evening. If Mr. Gert, or Peter, as he had insisted that I should call him, was an Austrian-born South African, the natural inference was that he was also Jewish. Yet, apart from his obvious prosperity and the boast that he was the hardest working man in Florence, he did not appear in the least Semitic. In fact, with his pink and white complexion, blue eyes and fair, slightly ginger, hair, he looked decidedly Teutonic. I wondered idly what precisely was his business and why he had chosen Florence as his headquarters rather than Milan, Genoa or Turin, for any one of those cities would have seemed to offer him a wider commercial field. But, then, while he had told me a great deal about himself

with an almost childlike naivety, he had never mentioned the nature of his business. That, too, was most un-Jewish of him. His was indubitably a complex character, and despite his gross, even unprepossessing appearance, I realised now that there was something captivating about him. The impertinent familiarity that I had at first resented, the flamboyant hospitality and the paraded sophistication, were, in fact, mere tributaries of a rather pathetic desire to be liked. I felt that while Mr. Gert, the astute, well-to-do business man, was rightly proud of his achievements, Peter Gert, the fat, uncouth young man from Johannesburg, despised himself, and that these dual personalities were always in conflict. Now that I was growing drowsy, the two distinct natures in the one man took on a strange nightmare quality. Finally, I fell asleep to dream that I was dancing a stately *pavane* partnered by a nebulous creature whose disturbing habit it was to keep changing from Marie Antoinette into Peter Gert and back again.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN I arrived at Gatti's café the following afternoon, Peter and his mother were already seated at a table. Frau Gert was a handsome, elderly lady. The light summer frock she wore was skilfully cut to hide the fact that she was fat. Over her hair, which was cleverly dyed leaving a few grey hairs amongst the brown, she wore a little veil falling below her eyes, that were large and brown and rather wistfully sad beneath her pencilled eyebrows. Fat though she was, she had poise and it was easy to see that she must have been beautiful. She carried a tiny lace fan, which she used elegantly. As Peter introduced me, she held up her hand for me to kiss, and I performed the gallantry with the clumsy artlessness of the average Englishman. She spoke English with difficulty, apologising for her poor vocabulary.

"I haf forgessen so moch," she told me. "Mit my 'usband und Pater ve spik always German, und so my Engleesh I haf forgessen."

Pater, as she called him, laughed. "You must practise with Tony. Neither of you has anything to do," he said gauchly. He was wearing an expensive brown shantung suit and, I felt out of respect to his mother, a tie. His manner was altogether more formal than on the previous evening, and the fact that his tic was more noticeable made me suspect that he was not at his ease. I had a feeling that he was a trifle afraid of the old lady for in her presence he seemed to

shed his arrogance, becoming once again the school-boy on his best behaviour.

The fact that she had forgotten her English did not deter Frau Gert from talking volubly between mouthfuls of ice-cream and sips of water.

She told me that she did not like either Italy or the Italians. The country was too hot and the people too dirty. She roundly abused her servants for indolent thieves. And in her contempt for Italian cooking, her English left her and she lapsed into a spate of German, for which Peter chided her gently.

"Talk English, Clari. Tony doesn't understand German," he told her.

She looked distressed and again began to apologise, so that I hastened to correct Peter, saying that while I did not speak the language, I understood it; a statement that was but a shallow truth.

To make conversation, I talked about Vienna and immediately Clari's eyes brightened.

"Ah Wien!" she cried delightfully. "You Wien know?"

I told her that I had known it well before the war, but had not returned since.

"You vood like *now* to go?" she asked meaningly.

"I think not. I would rather remember it as I knew it," I said.

"I also," she agreed. "Boot I can Wicn remember before the virst vurld vor. Then vos ze days!" she sighed nostalgically.

"You and your Vienna, Mutti! She spends her life regretting the past," Peter teased. "I prefer Paris and London."

"Ach! you. You vos boot und kleines kind ven ve vos in Wien. Zo 'ow can you spiek views?" she rebuked. "As for London it iz zo dirty, und—'ow do you say—glooms."

"Gloomy, Clari!" Peter laughed.

"Glooms is so much more descriptive," I said. "It's a wonderful word."

Clari when launched upon the sea of memories of her life in Vienna was hard to follow. As far as I could make out, she had spent a happy, carefree girlhood there. Her elder sister had been an opera singer—a well-known member of the Vienna State Opera Company—and as a young woman Clari's world had been peopled with musicians, actors, writers and artists, who gathered in the coffee houses of the Ringstrasse in winter and spent their summers on the banks of the Danube. She, too, had sung small rôles in opera and in the chorus. But when she had married, her husband had forbidden her to sing any more, except for his private edification. Apparently, too, he had disapproved of her Bohemian friends; in particular the men, for he was inordinately jealous, she told me fluttering her fan. I found the old lady's reminiscences entertaining, but Peter, who must have heard them countless times before, was becoming restless. He kept tilting back his chair, and twice nearly managed to upset the table so that his mother fiercely reprimanded him. His gaze wandered round the square and he kept glancing surreptitiously at his watch. Then, impetuously, he offered to drive her home, but she curtly refused, saying she was enjoying the pleasure of my company and that her husband had promised to call for her.

"It is so nice to mark conversations mit intelligence," she smiled, bowing towards me. "Ven I am alone mit Pater he never his mouth opens und that for me iz not interest. Only mit his jungen friends duz he talk," she grumbled. "Zometimes for days I do not see him und mit mein 'usband away all days I am alone too mouch. It is now drei days since I have not seen Pater," she added.

Feeling that I was in danger of being drawn into a

family dispute, I quickly complimented her on her lace fan, for it was obviously a favourite.

"It es from Espania," she told me, handing me the fan to admire.

Then, rather sharply, she asked Peter to give her a cigarette. He retorted that she was smoking too much.

"It's bad for your heart. The doctor told you so," he said.

"My 'eart ees only sad," she replied with a huge sigh.

Peter muttered "Christ!" under his breath and shot me an embarrassed glance.

"Do you mind waiting until my old man arrives?" he asked apologetically.

"Of course not," I told him.

"Then we can go to Layland's Bar and have a drink. It can be quite amusing around six-thirty." He spoke very quickly and scarcely above a whisper. Nevertheless, Clari not only heard, but understood.

"Boot you vill be home for souper?" she challenged.

Peter's neck sinews contracted spasmodically and his nose twitched.

"Tony has invited me to dine with him," he lied.

"Vy then com you not both home?" Clari insisted. "Vy vaste your money on this so bad food?"

"Mutti, he has other guests—friends of his. The party is all arranged already," he invented.

"Very vell," Clari said, accepting the situation with resignation. I felt that she knew that he was lying now just as he must have lied to her many times before under similar circumstances.

I suggested that I might dine with her another night and she seemed pleased.

"I vill mark goulash. You like paprika zauce?" she asked.

"Very much," I answered.

"You must go," Peter urged. "Clari is a wonderful cook."

Now that he had got his own way, I felt he was anxious to propitiate her for not dining at home. "The villa's charming," he added. "It's on the way to Fiesole."

"It is full mit fleas," Clari said somewhat unexpectedly. "You haf never zeen zo many fleas."

"She means, of course, flics," Peter whispered wearily.

"That vos vot I said. Zo vy laf you all the time at my English? If you vood spik more often mit me, I vood spik better," Clari harped.

"We will speak it together often, Frau Gert," I said trying to avoid further bickering.

"That vill not be interest for you," she replied, now determined to enjoy her martyrdom.

I could not help but feel sorry for her, for she was palpably a lonely old woman and probably friendless in a strange country whose language she could not speak. But I sensed, too, that she was spoilt and, like all spoilt people, she was possessive. I began to understand why Peter maintained his own apartment.

The party was becoming a strain and I wondered how long it would be before Papa Gert arrived to take Clari home. In spite of her doctor's warning, she was smoking furiously and seemed to relish the fact that she had managed to create an atmosphere. Peter did his best to overcome it. He offered her another cassata which she refused, saying they were no good, and relapsed again into sulky silence.

Then, to my infinite relief, her husband arrived.

"Here is now Jupie mit the car," Clari said, looking over my shoulder.

I turned to see a splendid, grey Lincoln Continental, driven by a smart, young uniformed chauffeur, pull up in the square.

"What a magnificent car!" I said.

"The old man's mad about fast cars," Peter told me. "That's his latest toy."

"It is not zo magnificent at all," Clari contradicted. "I to get in haf to crowl."

"Tony's Rolls would suit you much better," Peter laughed.

"Natürlich," she answered. Then she spoke rapidly to Peter in German, and he hurriedly left the table.

Clari explained that she wanted me to meet her husband and had sent Peter to tell the chauffeur to wait.

"You would like to meet him?" she asked anxiously.

"Very much," I said, and the old lady smiled.

"I am sorry for you that ve quarrels. Boot Pater is always so selfesch mit me. He never thinks for me, boot only for himself. Boot it is my fault. I haf too much spoilt him. He is my only one. I think you understand for you are *sympathetisch*. You know vot means *sympathetisch*?" she asked patting my knee with her fan.

I said that I did.

"Ah, now they com," Clari smiled, and the little moment of confidence was over.

Followed by Peter, Jupie, as she called him, came lumbering between the tables towards us. Everyone in the now crowded café turned to look at him. A massive, bearlike man, beside whom Peter seemed almost slight, he was dressed in an expensive-looking soft grey suit and a somewhat wideawake panama hat. His jacket was open, but in spite of his size and the heat, his silk shirt was without a crease. In his white silk tie he wore a magnificent pearl pin, and from a little pocket at his immense waistline hung a gold fobchain.

Removing his hat, he bowed low, kissing his wife's hand, and made some endearing little remark to her.

Then Peter introduced me to him, and he bowed again as we shook hands.

Although the tip of his nose was badly disfigured by a scar and his face was fleshy, he was a handsome man with fine eyes that twinkled with merriment.

"Pater tells me a sailor you are," he said. "In the Bridish Navy."

"No longer," I explained.

"I love very mouch the Bridish, boot I hate the sea!" he laughed. "I haf travelled the world over by sea, boot still I hate it! Now, always I goes by plane." His English was no better than his wife's, but, unlike her, he did not worry about it. One felt that in this tremendous zest for life such trivialities as accents and languages were of no consequence.

I thought at once that I had never met so large a man who exuded so much vitality. Surrounded by the tables of languid Italians and a few wilting American tourists, he glowed with energy like some huge sun, reducing to insignificance all lesser lights.

"Com," he cried, clapping his hands for the waiter, "Let us eat ices." His hands were small and their fingers, with their carefully manicured nails, slender. I noticed that on the little finger of his left hand he wore a large signet ring which was a replica of the one Peter wore.

When the waiter hurried to our table, Jupie told Peter to order ices. "Pater," he said, turning to me, "is like a parrot. He spiks all the languages. For me I haf no time."

From his pocket he produced a crocodile-skin cigar-case. "Haf a cigar? They are goot und not strong. Mein Gott! boot it is hot! In my bureau it is hotter than hell! I think, Clari, ve go to the mountains for zome fresh vinds. To the Dolomites, no?" He addressed her gently as one might a petulant child that had to be humoured.

"Com mit us to the Dolomites," he said slapping me on the shoulder. "Vy stay you in Florence in this heat? It is not goot."

I explained that I had only just arrived and that I had friends whom I must look up.

"You the time haf. You are not a busy man. That I can see," he said intuitively.

Then he asked me if I was fond of fishing, and chuckled with delight when I admitted that it was almost my favourite pastime.

"Then com you fishing," he suggested.

I told him that I had ncither rods nor tackle with me, but he dismissed the excuse saying he had enough for both of us.

Peter laughed and said: "Now you've done it! Jupie is always looking for someone to go fishing with him."

"Und vhy not? Here nobodies haf the energies for sports. They are too lazy or they think only of foutball. Who boot an Italian vood foutball play in this heat?" he asked contemptuously.

He told me that fishing and shooting—or hunting, as he called it—were his hobbies, and that on his farm in South-West Africa he had shot practically every type of game.

"There vos the place for sportsmens—real sportsmens!" he cried, rolling his "r"s richly.

The waiter brought the ices, and Jupie fell upon the big, pink and white mountain of ice with fervour.

"It is goot, no?" he laughed, digging in his spoon and filling his mouth. "Und it is goot to digest also. It is not true vot they say that it is fattening," he added, smiling mischievously at Clari.

Everything he did he seemed to enjoy abundantly, and his enthusiasm was so infectious that I found myself awaiting the arrival of a second ice like an

excited child. Even Clari cheered up, forgetting her grievances, in Jupie's presence. Peter, on the other hand, seemed eclipsed by his father. Physically, they were very much alike. By that I mean they were both big, powerful, flamboyant men; as strong as oxen. Separately, each was an impressive, dominating personality. Yet, when seen together, one realised that Peter was but a rather inferior imitation of the genuine article. Instinctively, one felt that he would never mature into the old man's rich, sparkling personality. While they sprung from the same roots, the father belonged to an altogether superior vintage. It was not, either, that Peter had tried to model himself in his father's likeness and had failed in the attempt, for, even at this stage in our acquaintanceship, I had the impression that he was slightly ashamed of him. The old man's uninhibited enthusiasm for life, his simple affability, even his indifference to all languages other than his native tongue, offended Peter's bourgeois sense.

Later, as I drove with him to Layland's Bar, he confirmed this view by becoming half-apologetic for Jupie's behaviour.

"Have you ever heard anything like it?" he laughed, thumping the steering wheel boisterously.

"Like what?" I questioned.

"Why the old man's English."

"It's rather sweet," I said truthfully. But I think he suspected that I was just being polite.

"It's quite amazing that he can't or won't bother to learn. God knows how he'd manage in business without me!"

"There must have been a time when he did."

"He was in Vienna and Berlin then and didn't have to speak anything but bloody German! Now it's different. But still he won't make the slightest effort. I suffer agonies with him sometimes."

"But, why? Neither he nor your mother are Germans. They're Austrians," I reasoned.

"How many people realise that? To most people, if you speak German, you're a German. And who wants to be taken for a bloody Hun?" he asked almost fiercely.

"Do you hate them so much?" I asked.

"I loathe their guts! And I don't like the Austrians much better," he added. Then he told me with that inevitable touch of defiance that he was Jewish.

"I suppose you realised that?" he asked arrogantly.

"I guessed you were. But you don't look like one," I answered.

"There can't be much doubt about it when we're all together—as a family, I mean," he said.

I told him that I could not see that it mattered anyway, and that personally I had no anti-semitic feelings, adding that one of my closest friends was a Jew. But he refused to be satisfied.

"Every Christian has his pet Jew!" he mocked.

"The trouble with you Jews is that you're racially hypochondriacal," I told him. "You take a morbid pleasure in being different. And that I find infinitely boring!"

"Touché!" he laughed. Then he said that his nerves were on edge, explaining that he had had a trying day at his office.

"The old man can be the very devil to work with. He's as obstinate as they make 'em and won't delegate any responsibility to anyone and still insists on treating me like a child. Actually, I could run that business on my ear."

"What business is it exactly?" I asked.

"Banking," he answered. "You should come to the office sometime. It's a madhouse—thanks to Jupie!" he added crossly.

"Perhaps he'll go fishing in the Dolomites," I suggested, and Peter laughed bitterly. "Not a chance!" he said. "In twenty-four hours, he'd be bored stiff and back at the office. But he might go if you went with him," he added tentatively. When I did not answer, he laughed. "You're not rising to that fly, are you?"

"Well . . ." I hesitated.

"I don't blame you! I've been on those trips and I know what they're like. No one gets a chance to fish except Jupie. He's like a little boy who wants to play with all the toys at once! But if you'd take him off my hands for a day or two, I'll stand you the finest dinner in town!"

"I'll think about it," I said. "But for the moment, I'll accept your offer of a drink."

Layland's Bar was already crowded by the time we arrived.

"We'd better go to the bar," Peter said. He seemed to know everyone and, as we moved between the tables, he stopped to chat, speaking now in Italian and then in English and in Spanish to one old lady with steely blue hair, whose beringed claw he kissed.

At the bar, he ordered our dry martinis and introduced me to an American youth with a crew-cut and tight-fitting jeans.

"Tony, meet Rudie," he said. "Rudie's been studying music here for three years and he still hasn't mastered the First Movement of the Moonlight!"

"Get you!" Rudie said, waving his hand. His voice was high pitched and strident. "How long have you known this big, butch bastard?" he asked. But before I could answer, Peter said: "Rudie, you're stinking," and turned to greet a darkly handsome young man, wearing a white shirt open at the neck to reveal a large

sapphire and diamond cross nestling against his hirsute chest.

"Manolo, come sta? How come you're not in Capri? So unfashionable to be in Florence in August," Peter prattled.

"But more vulgar to be in Capri!" the dark young man said archly. He held a very *bouffant*, miniature black poodle in his arms and fed it languidly with nuts.

Peter introduced me, being careful to use my full name.

"Manolo is from Rio," he said. "He has a lovely villa near San Miniato, with a ceiling by Tiepolo in his bedroom and some superb della Robbias practically everywhere!"

A strapping woman, with untidy yellow hair, pushed her way across the room towards us.

"Pedro, you old so-and-so!" she croaked, "why haven't you called me up?" Her huge, rampant breasts struggled for freedom beneath her striped fisherman's jersey.

Peter kissed her painted cheeks. "Meet Cassandra, my favourite woman," he laughed, slapping her ample behind.

"Buy me a martini—and make it snappy!" Cassandra shouted. Then she asked me what I was doing in "this neck of the woods".

Peter told her: "He's just run away from Cannes to escape from people like you, honey!"

She guffawed loudly, opening her mouth so widely that I could see her uvula dancing on her nicotine-stained tongue like a mad marionette.

Cassandra, I gathered, was a sculptress. She was anxious to use Willie as a model in a group of figures, depicting the Seven Deadly Sins, she was creating for a wealthy Texan who, she explained, had found Christ as well as oil.

"You *will* loan him to me?" she wheedled.

"On a strictly artistic basis—yes," Peter chaffed, "and only if you promise to make him *Sloth* so that I can hold it against him for *ever*!"

By now the aperitif hour had reached its peak and the bar was packed; in the babel of tongues, American predominated. Peter, revelling in its cosmopolitan atmosphere and beginning to sweat profusely, refused a second cocktail and called for Coca-Cola.

"It's O.K. for all of you, but I have to work tomorrow," he said.

"You're so stinking rich, you could keep us all!" Rudie slurred.

"Who'd want to keep you, anyway, Rudie darling?" Cassandra shouted. Then she said: "Let's get to hell out of here and go some place where we can breathe!"

"There's nowhere else to go—nowhere amusing," Peter argued.

"If you think this bed of pansies amusing you must be nuts, honey!" she laughed, "but if you insist on staying, buy me another drink."

"No. Let's go," Peter said, gruffly.

Once outside the bar, he offered to drive me home. But I said that I would walk and stood on the pavement while Cassandra climbed a little unsteadily into Peter's car.

"Well, I'm not doing any walking!" she bellowed. "Come on, Pedro, let's get going."

"She couldn't walk if she wanted to," Peter said. "I wish I knew why these Lesbians get so offensive when they're tight!" he added crossly.

Cassandra shouted to me to get into the car.

"Jump on the old haywain, honey, and come with us!"

But as Peter let out the clutch fiercely, she slumped backwards in her seat.

"I'll call you up," he said over his shoulder.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FOLLOWING morning, Peter telephoned to say that his parents wanted me to dine with them that evening. I told him that I was engaged and he named an evening two days later. When I accepted, he suggested that we should meet at his office.

"It's Number Twenty, Via Dei Benci. You'll see the name on the door—Compagnia Italiano-Americano per Commercio. Come about six. The family like to dine early," he added with distaste.

The Gert's office I found was not far from the Franciscan church of Santa Croce, in one of the oldest quarters of the city, on the first floor of a splendid building with fine vaulted ceilings and frescoed walls. Modern commercial life seemed incongruous in such a setting, and it was almost a shock to hear its rooms echoing with the rattle of typewriters.

In an outer office, I handed my card to the pretty little receptionist and inquired for "Mr. Peter Gert". She offered me a seat on an old Renaissance chair and, while she chirruped into the telephone, I sat staring at a large blackboard bearing the stock market prices in London, New York, Paris and Rome on the opposite wall, that had replaced, one felt, a Titian or a Giorgione.

Then instead of some Florentine noble in doublet and hose, Peter appeared in his shirt sleeves through the arched doorway.

"I expected at least the ghost of Giovanni de Medici?" I said.

He laughed. "And all you see is an overworked, underpaid banker! Welcome to the Gert's Circus."

Taking my arm, he led me through a room filled with girls typing, to his own office. In common with other rooms, it was beautifully proportioned and its heavily-carved ceiling was gilded. The big desk, set at an angle to the stone-mullioned windows, was littered with papers and on it stood three telephones, one of which now started ringing.

Peter sprawled in his highbacked chair and picked up the receiver, bursting into torrential Italian. Then he slammed down the instrument, dusting his hands in a gesture of disgust.

"Crots!" he laughed. "What do they take me for—a baby in crawlers?"

Picking up another telephone, he asked to speak to his father, and they talked for some minutes in German. The conversation was thickly larded with throaty numerals, and I felt that Peter was playing the Big Business Executive for my edification. Finally, he told Jupie that I had arrived.

"Let's join the old man and call it a day," he suggested, putting on his jacket. "By the way, I won't be with you to-night," he said. "I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not," I told him, with more truth than he realised, for I was convinced that the dinner party would be more convivial without him.

The room that Jupie used as his office must have been the principle salon in the days when the whole building was the palace of some local nobleman. For splendour, its painted ceiling, marble floor and damask-covered walls, completely eclipsed all the other rooms I had seen. Instinctively, I stopped on the threshold to admire its beauty. Jupie, sitting behind

an ornate Second Empire desk of vast proportions, looked more like an ambassador than a banker, as he rose to greet me.

"It is beautiful, no?" he said, waving his hand towards the ceiling. "I find it difficult to do business for looking at it. In such a room one should make love—not business. It is a profanity to discuss the market under that ceiling!" he chuckled.

"Jupie would discuss the market in Heaven!" Peter laughed.

"Well, I haf discussed it sufficient for to-day," the old man said firmly. "Com, ve vill go home. Pater, is my car there?"

The car, together with Peter's convertible, was waiting outside. The two of them seemed to fill the narrow street, and around them was gathered a little group of admirers.

"You should have brought your Rolls," Peter said. "Then we would have had a motor show!"

"Vy always do you vont to show off like a liddle boy?" his father said sharply, and Peter looked crushed.

"I'll see you to-morrow," he said sullenly and walked to his car.

Jupi spoke to his chauffeur in German, calling him Rudie. He was a dashing youngster in a smart uniform, who wore his cap at a rakish angle.

"Drive mit care," his master told him. "I haf paid fines enough for you already."

"Jawohl, Herr Doktor," the boy grinned.

As we drove away, Jupie explained that Rudie was from Bolsano which had been annexed from Austria after the first war.

"Poor Austria! It is no longer a country," he said shaking his head sadly. "Yet at Caporetto ve haf the Italian Army defeated. Ve should haf von that vor. Instead, ve sued for peace." The old man told me that

he had fought with the Austrian cavalry and had spent one terrible winter with the artillery high up in the Alps.

"It vos hell hauling those big guns up the mountains, und to vot purpose?" he laughed bitterly. "Vor is so stupid. In the last, I vos on the side of the Bridisch. A doctor mit the South African Army und still the Italians are my enemy. Where is the sense of it all?"

Then, dismissing the problem, he offered me a cigar and asked if I was hungry.

"It is important that you should be, for my vife has a goot dinner prepared. It vill be a real Austrian dinner. No pasta!" He wrinkled his nose disdainfully. "I haf no liking for all that pasta. It just swells the stomach. I hope also that you like Hock? I can give you something most special vot I chooses myself from the Rhine."

"I like it very much indeed," I said.

"I also. Boot it must not be too cold. In your country they always serve too cold und that destroys the bouquet," he explained.

The car had now turned into the Lungarno Della Zecca Vecchia, and as the road widened, Rudie increased speed, and Jupie lent forward to look at the speedometer, telling his chauffeur to slow down.

"He is crazy this boy. Always he vonts to show off. In that he is like Pater," he laughed. "Boot Pater is a fine driver. If he vos not, he vood long ago be dead! When I vos Peter's age, I also liked to go mit speed."

I said that I suspected that he still did, otherwise he would not own such a powerful car. He chuckled and told me that he had always owned big cars. One of his first had been a Mercedes-Benz. He described it affectionately as a "monster".

"Mein Gott, boot it could go!" he said, slapping my knee. "Beside it, this is nothings. Just a cheap

American nonsense. Mit my Mercedes I once hit a liddle house und the house not the Mercedes collapses!" he said joyously. "To do such a thing mit this vood be disaster."

Rudie, understanding the substance of the story, joined in the joke and Jupie reprimanded him sharply.

"They are all the same these modern servants. They vill not their places remember. My vife talks too much mit him because he spiiks her language und so he thinks he is one mit the family. Vimin always ruins goot servants. You haf suspected that?" he asked. But before I could answer, he said: "Boot you are a single man und so vood not haf that problem. In some vays it is goot to be a single man, boot in others not. Vhen you haf taken the dinner mit me, you vill see that it is better to marry a voman vot is a goot cook. As you grows old, that is a matter mit great importance. For the rest, it is not any more interesting," he added, throwing the stump of his cigar out of the window. With it seemed to go all the rest in marriage that Jupie no longer considered interesting.

The Gerts' villa was a little way out of the city, on the road to Fiesole. We approached it up a steep, walled lane, running between the gardens of other villas. Turning through iron gates, the car stopped before a flight of shallow steps at the top of which Clari stood waiting for us. A wire-haired fox terrier came dashing through the garden, jumping joyously round Jupie's legs as he got out of the car. The old man gathered it up into his arms, caressing it and talking to it in German.

"Moki, Moki!" he cried affectionately, hugging the dog to him.

He seemed hugely pleased to be home and I stood back, momentarily feeling an intruder upon the simple pleasure of his return, while he lumbered up the steps carrying the dog in his arms. He kissed Clari lightly

on both cheeks, and then called to me over his shoulder: "Com. Take off your coat. Here we can be comfortable mit no ones to give us trouble."

Putting the dog gently aside, he took off his jacket, rolling up his shirt sleeves.

"Let us haf something cold to drink. I am thirsty," he said to Clari.

"I haf un cocktail made for you," she told him.

"So! *You* haf made a cocktail! Und now ve will be drunk, for you knows nothings of cocktails," he teased.

"I haf made it from the book Pater gives to me," she defended. "It is from the Savoy Hotel in London und you shall sec if it is not goot."

"Bring it! Bring it!" Jupie laughed. "How vill ve tell if it is goot when it is still in the kitchen?"

A young Italian maid, in a neat white apron, came from the house, carrying a cocktail shaker and glasses on a large silver tray. She seemed shy and watched Clari anxiously from under long dark lashes. I suspected that she was the latest of a long line of similar little maids, all of whom had failed to satisfy their exacting mistress. A suspicion that was confirmed when Jupie, as soon as the girl had retired, asked who she was.

"Her name is Maria," Clari told him.

"It is as vell that they are always called the same, otherwise, I should never remember them." Jupie's eyes twinkled with amusement. But Clari sighed heavily.

"It is vell that you should laugh, boot for me it is nothing funny that they are all idiots. To run a house mit them is not possible," she began. But Jupie had evidently no intention of allowing her to monopolise the conversation with her domestic troubles.

"Com, give us this great cocktail from the Savoy Hotel. Ve are all excitement to try it," he interrupted.

As Clari poured out the drinks, he told her that she, too, must have one.

"Ve must be poisoned together, no?" he winked.

But Clari carried her drink into the house, asking that we should excuse her while she supervised the dinner, and her husband called after her that she must drink her cocktail and not throw it away.

"Boot she vill," he told me when she had left us. "She does not like cocktails, only sometimes a liddle vine. Yet this is not so bad," he said smacking his lips.

From the verandah we looked out over the city of Florence and saw the domes and spires of its churches tipped with gold by the last rays of the setting sun, and the distant hills across the valley turn to purple and then to black against the evening sky. The shadows of the tall cypress trees lengthened over the garden and a soft breeze rolled away the heat of the day. The air was rich with the scent of honeysuckle.

Jupie settled himself more comfortably into his chaise-longue.

"It is very beautiful here at this time of the day," he said. "Boot I prfer a countryside vot is more vild."

"Where there are mountains and trout streams and deer forests?" I suggested.

"Surely," he agreed. "Or even the veldt like mit my varm in South-Vest Africa."

"Why did you leave it? You seem to have been very fond of it."

He shrugged his great shoulders, and it was a few seconds before he answered.

"I left for Pater," he said. "He found it dull. He vonted to be in Johannesburg where there vos more life. So ve go to Johannesburg und I start there for Pater a business. Then after a while my vife begins to feel sad for Europe und so ve comes here. For myself I vood stay on my varm in Africa for the rest of my life, just hunting und breeding sheeps. I vos very

contented to do that. Sometimes I wonder if I had the right things done to consider Pater so much. Sometimes I think he should have been obliged to make for himself the way. Boot then Clari would not like that. She has spoiled him very much." The old man scarcely seemed aware of my presence and was musing to himself.

So, I thought, that is the other side of the picture. A picture in which Peter was no longer the indispensable interpreter for his father's business, but the spoiled only son, capricious and demanding, for whose sake old Jupie had been coerced by Clari into returning to business. Which, one wondered, was closer to reality? Possibly, while both presented a point of view, neither was wholly true to life. Although I was ready to believe in Jupie's love of his farm and of hunting, I could not accept the fact that he had really been content to bury himself for ever on his African farm. I had met men like him before. Men who had amassed fortunes and bought country estates, dreaming of retiring to them or even realising their dream, only to become bored to distraction away from a business that was their very reason for living. It struck me as probable that in the process of starting Peter in business, Jupie had once again become happily engrossed in it. Only at moments like the present, when he relaxed at the end of the day's work, did he begin to regret his years of retirement.

It must have been while I sat thus listening to Jupie's musings that I became conscious of a growing affection for the old man. In retrospect, it is difficult to be certain, for since that evening when I first dined at the villa so much has happened. Probably, if the truth were known, I was less aware of any such emotion than I was of the presence of the little maidservant who flitted round the candlelit table like a frightened moth. I do know, however, that I was aware of a

sense of well-being for which the excellence of the dinner was not wholly responsible. I find it hard to define that sense or to say now precisely what fostered it. Possibly it was nurtured by the atmosphere of unostentatious wealth that pervaded the house and that gave one a comfortable feeling of security. It may have been stimulated by the presence of Jupie himself sitting at the head of the narrow refectory table; a study of stability and poised self-assurance. Or it may even have been inspired by Clari's calm confidence in the success of each course that she had created with a truly patriotic disregard for the warmth of the night.

The dinner itself I still remember vividly. We drank clear bortsch on whose ruby red surface floated islands of sour cream. We ate a rich, auburn goulash, burning with paprika, and a wonderfully brittle layer cake, crowned with chopped nuts, glacé cherries and whipped cream. All this we washed down with Jupie's hock, drunk from tall, slender glasses, whose bowls were a lovely shade that was neither green nor yellow, but the colour of sunlight on young willow trees.

I remember that the long windows giving onto the verandah were open to the night and that, sitting between Jupie and Clari, I could see across the garden to the distant hills. The evening breeze had died with the setting sun and a great stillness possessed the garden.

I remember, too, that the room in which we dined was furnished with unobtrusive good taste, and that on the wall behind my chair hung two delicate Venetian scenes, by Guardi, and a Carlo Dolci, whose authenticity Jupie denied.

He substantiated this opinion with an authoritative-ness that surprised me for I had never suspected the bluff, somewhat ingenuous old man of being a connoisseur of art. Yet, as he talked, I discovered that he possessed a sensitive love of great paintings as well as critical knowledge. When he spoke of the pictures in

the Uffizi and Pitti Galleries he did so as an expert, so that I realised how superficial was my acquaintance with them.

As we sat on the verandah after dinner over our coffee and liqueurs, and smoked our cigars, Clari regretted that a lack of a common language placed severe limits upon our conversation.

"So much we miss from each other," she said. "My husband is so goot a talker in his own language. He knows so many things und has read so many books."

"Und yet like a liddle child I am all the time lost for vords!" Jupie laughed.

I had rather dreaded this moment in the evening when, with dinner over, the pleasure of eating no longer provided an excuse for moments of silence. But, gradually, the ordeal of talking in broken English ceased to bother me, the stilted conversation increased in tempo and both Clari and Jupie, seeming to take courage from the surrounding darkness, struggled less desperately for words. Both of them, too, were enjoying the novelty of a guest, for they told me that, except for a few of Peter's friends, they seldom entertained.

I felt that they were both a little lonely and, after the fashion of old people who have lived long together, were somewhat bored by each other's company. Only when sharing their past experiences with a third party did they relive them with any sense of enjoyment. As a writer, even if my motives for so being are selfish, I am a good audience, and so can be mistaken for a charming guest. That evening, by supplying the missing word every once in a while, interposing with the occasional French phrase and understanding a good deal more German than I had thought possible, I began to know the old couple quite well.

I learnt, for instance, that Jupie's father had owned a tannery outside Vienna, while Jupie himself had

studied to become a doctor. At exactly what point in his life he had forsaken medicine for banking, I cannot be certain. But, as a young man, in common with the rest of his generation in Austria, he had found himself involved in his country's continual troubles with the Balkan States, and eventually, as he had told me earlier, in the first World War. Yet, in between times, he had travelled to the Argentine on his father's behalf and found the leisure to woo Clari, the young opera singer, and to marry her on the eve of battle.

I have noticed that in the lives of all rich and successful men of commerce, particularly when they have acquired wealth and achieved fame by their own volition, the period of transition from comparative poverty to established fortune is invariably lost in obscurity. One moment your self-made man is the struggling repairer of punctured bicycle tyres, the harrassed reporter on a small town newspaper, and the next a tycoon of the Motor Industry or a Fleet Street Baron. The interim years between the conception and the birth of power, as though tainted by impropriety, are never mentioned. Such, so far as I could see, was the case with Jupie, and as such I accepted it for it ran true to the conventional pattern.

If he and Clari had ever experienced poverty as young married people, they had long ago forgotten it. Indeed, when one looked at them against the background of their established wealth, it was hard to imagine them in any other setting. One felt that even when Jupie fled before the rising ride of Nazism he must have done so with all the splendour of some gold-laden galleon, bound for the New World. Not for him, one felt, the secret flight through the night, accompanied by Clari, the infant Peter in her arms; three ragged refugees seeking sanctuary in some foreign land. One knew instinctively that the old man's restless progress across the continent of Africa

to Johannesburg and back to Europe by way of Florence, had been made with all the pomp and circumstance his money could provide. Even Clari could not complain that she had not always travelled *de luxe*.

It was late when I finally said good-night to Clari and Jupie as we stood on the steps leading to the garden and waited for the car.

"Now that you know they vay, you must com when you vish," Jupie invited.

"One evening you com mit Pater und ve play bridge," Clari suggested. "Jupie und I are always here."

Then the car swung into the drive sweeping away the darkness from the garden with its great headlights.

"Think, too, about the fishing. Maybe I can take time off from my bureau," Jupie said.

But Clari laughed at him. "Do not belive him, Toni. Never vill he do that. For him it is always vork!"

As I drove away, I saw the old couple walking slowly arm-in-arm up the steps to the villa, the fox terrier, Moki, trotting behind them. Then Rudie asked me where I wanted to go and I told him to drive me to my hotel, for I felt suddenly in need of a large whisky and soda, and the Excelsior Bar I knew would supply me with the best whisky.

CHAPTER FOUR

I NEVER went fishing with Jupie in the Dolomites. Instead, I drove up to San Marino, perched on its pinnacle of rock, to play roulette in its little casino. I went because on that self same night that I dined with the Gerts as I sat at the bar in the Excelsior Hotel, lazily clinking the ice in my whisky glass, I met an old friend. She was an ageless German Baroness of extreme beauty, who painted heinously ugly abstracts and lived not in a state of grace but enchantment with a croupier. She told me that Rinaldo, for such was his name, after months of relentless practise, could cast the little ivory ball upon the spinning wheel with premeditated precision. Foolishly, perhaps, I listened to her. But I am a gambler and I believe in luck without doubting, which is the definition of true faith. Moreover, I am easily gulled.

So I went to San Marino, taking with me the Baroness. And because she was beautiful and gay, with those superbly long legs bestowed by God exclusively upon certain women of her race, we stopped at Papa Blanco's, in Bologna, where there is better food than anywhere else in Italy, always provided that one is numbered among Papa's friends.

Late the following afternoon, we climbed the long, dusty road to where the State of San Marino rises out of the rocks like a fairy castle in an Edmund Dulac picture book. That night and all the next day I played roulette. But either because Rinaldo's native jealousy

overcame his professional pride or luck took arms against our conspiracy, I failed to win, and fled in the face of disaster back to Florence.

Two lays later in the Excelsior Bar, I was commiserating with the Baroness for having travelled from San Marino beneath her station and a blazing sun by bus, when I saw Peter.

He hesitated in the doorway as if surprised to find that I was not alone, and I saw his glance rest upon the Baroness. For a moment I thought he was going to leave without speaking to me. I think I would have been relieved had he done so, for the Baroness had not yet fully recovered from the painful scene with Rinaldo that had precipitated her undignified return journey. Moreover, Peter was dressed in a beige silk suit with which he had chosen to wear a salmon pink tie with a *motif* of mauve seahorses. This summery costume accentuated the grossness of his appearance, and I recalled with apprehension my companion's prejudice against fat, fair men that dated from an uncouth adventure in a Bavarian forest with Herman Goering.

I felt her recoil slightly at Peter's approach. He was at his most debonair, and I noticed that the suit and the tie were new and that he wore them with pride.

Bowing over the Baroness's hand, his blue eyes sharply appraised the large cabochon emerald ring she always wore on the little finger of her right hand. Calling the barman loudly by his Christian name, he ordered champagne cocktails and seated himself at the bar. He had, he explained, telephoned me two days ago only to be told that I had gone away. This evening he had called on the off chance that I might have returned. If his reason for calling was urgent, he had evidently decided that this was not the moment to mention it.

I had introduced the Baroness, adding that she was an old friend, and I immediately felt that Peter was

trying to estimate the exact measure of our friendship. I was amused to see that while he was quite apparently attracted to her she still remained an enigma to him. His knowledge of women, I reflected, probably extended no further than hoydenish creatures like the bibulous Cassandra, whose jovial tolerance of the more curious forms of sexual expression he mistook for worldliness. I thought it doubtful that he had ever encountered any woman quite like my Baroness, for he seemed a little uncertain of himself in her presence. To hide his discomfort, he assumed a boisterous gallantry that possibly appeared less artificial to a stranger than to one who knew him well. At least, I hoped that such was the case, and I was relieved that in the face of Peter's frank admiration the Baroness's preconceived opinions of fat, fair men faltered, and she became quite charming. She accepted the cigarette he offered her from a heavy gold case, and she allowed her hand to rest on his as he held out his lighter. She managed to smile when he said that she reminded him so much of a middle-aged blonde who was his favourite film star. She did no more than raise a plucked eyebrow when he asked her if he might call her Tiella, which was her pet name. Obviously, he was impressed by her title and even more by the fact that she was a "von". But most of all, I think, it pleased his vanity to be sitting at the bar with a beautiful elegant woman. He talked rather loudly and kept looking over his shoulder into the room to see who was there.

Strangely enough, I think Tiella liked him. Certainly, as he prattled on about all the people he knew in Florence, she seemed to forget the Rinaldo incident sufficiently to laugh at Peter's heavy innuendos. When he left us to speak to some friends, she said rather astonishingly that she found him refreshing and asked where I had picked him up. I said the

reverse was the truth and that, in fact, he had picked me up. She laughed and said: "I think he's rather fun in a deliciously vulgar sort of way!" Then she suggested that I should invite him to dine with us, and immediately upon his return she extended the invitation on my behalf.

Peter glowed with pleasure. "Tremendous fun!" he said. "Where shall we go?"

Tiella named a little restaurant just across the road from the hotel that was always as crowded as it was expensive.

"They give you the best scampi in Florence," she said.

Then Peter pressed another champagne cocktail on us. "Just while I make a phone call," he said, and I felt certain that he went to ring up his apartment to say that he would not be home to dinner. I suppose I looked cross because Tiella started laughing.

"Cheri, you're annoyed!"

I admitted that I was and said that I had hoped that we might dine together, somewhere out-of-doors. To humour me, she suggested we might all go to Fiesole.

"Three's a crowd," I told her to my immediate regret.

"But your fat friend intrigues me. I can't think why, but he does," Tiella confessed, looking puzzled.

She had so concisely voiced my own feeling towards Peter that, forgetting my moment of pique, I laughed.

"You find that funny?" she queried.

"Shall we say bizarre," I answered and started to explain. "You said he was vulgar. He's also uncouth, humourless, purse-proud and bourgeois," I began.

"At least to be bourgeois is no sin. One is either born so or one is not," Tiella interrupted.

"The sin is in remaining so," I argued.

"He has a kind heart," she defended.

"Agreed. I am not, you must understand, criticising my fat friend, as you call him, but merely making an analysis."

Tiella laughed "I understand that perfectly."

"So that we may discover the reason for liking him."

"Must there always be a reason?"

"Unless one is in love or infatuated—yes."

"In that case there must be a most positive reason,"

Tiella said firmly. "Let us analyse his virtues."

"You have said that he is kind-hearted. What next?"

She thought for a moment before answering.

"He has brains. He is—what's the word—dynamic."

"Yes. What else?"

"It's your turn," she said, taking a drink.

"Have you run out of virtues?" I taunted.

"No," she said over the top of her glass. "I would say that he has virility."

"And you class that amongst the virtues?"

"Even above charity!" Tiella answered, emptying her glass. Then she said: "Tell me about his family."

"His mother was an opera singer. Now she is hugely fat and when she walks her thighs whisper together quite audibly."

Tiella wrinkled her nose fastidiously.

"How disgusting!"

"On the contrary; it is rather a cosy, homely sound," I explained.

"What about the father?" she asked.

"He's a banker—a financial tycoon . . ."

"I always thought a tycoon was some kind of embryo. But I must be mistaken. What is it?" she laughed.

"A business magnate, a Captain of Industry, a financial wizard," I elaborated. "In other words, Herr Doktor Julius Gert."

"So he's a doktor? Of what?" Tiella asked.

"You should know that in your country one can be a doktor of practically everything!" I laughed. "But whatever he's a doktor of, he's a dear. He's extremely cultured, erudite, and devoted to fishing and dogs."

Tiella chuckled.

"So, naturally, you are his slave!"

"I should have gone fishing with him in the Dolomites," I said. "Instead, I went with you to San Marino."

"I would rather you did not speak of that. It is most tactless of you to have mentioned it," she said, thus bursting the bubble of our flippancy. "I will have a cocktail, please."

As I ordered her cocktail, Peter returned. He said that he had taken the liberty of ordering our table for dinner, and I felt slightly ashamed of myself.

"Then we need not hurry," I said, and as an act of contrition called for another round of drinks.

We were sitting over our wine after dinner when Peter told us that he was going with some friends to Elba for the weekend. I said that my geography was bad and asked where the Island was. So, pushing aside the empty plates, he drew a rough map on the marble-topped table.

"It seems most inaccessible," I remarked. But he assured me that the Island was easily reached by car, *via* Piza and Laverno, and thence to a little port down the coast, whose name I can no longer remember.

"From there," he explained, "you take the ferry over to the Island."

"And then, I suppose, you walk," Tiella smiled.

"Jesus, no! Can you picture this boy walking?" Peter guffawed.

We said that we could not.

"I take the car across on the ferry. Elba's no fun without a car," he added. Then he described to us the charms of the Island. According to him, its beaches

were beautiful and unpopulated and its hotels comfortable, if a trifle primitive.

Tiella gave a shudder.

"Primitive! That ominous word! I know what that means. No running water and a lavatory somewhere in the hinterland."

But Peter said she was exaggerating.

"When I say comfortable, I mean comfortable," he bragged. "And you haven't tasted wine until you have drunk the local brew. I'll tell you another thing and that is that the lobsters in Elba are out of this world," he added.

Tiella told him that he was a good salesman.

"It's my job to be," he laughed. "How about me selling you both the idea of coming to Elba this weekend?"

I realised suddenly it was with just that idea in mind that he had called to see me earlier in the evening. He had refrained from mentioning it on account of Tiella. Now, after the champagne cocktails and the wine at dinner, he was in his most expansive mood and he was, to use his own expression, all for a party.

I looked desperately across the table at Tiella. But she sat, with her chin resting on her hands, smiling dreamily at Peter. Quite obviously she was a little tipsy, I decided angrily.

"Let's go," I said, rather loudly, so as to make myself heard above the noise of the crowded little restaurant.

Tiella turned to me, grinning delightfully.

"Yes, let's."

As I got up to pay the bill, she asked: "What's the hurry?"

"I thought we had agreed to go," I said curtly.

She put her hand on my arm. "You're all confused, darling! It must be the wine."

Struggling to keep my temper, I said precisely: "You said that you wanted to go."

"To Elba, my sweet. I meant let's go to Elba. Don't you understand?" she added patiently.

I sat down heavily in my chair. There could be no question but that she was drunk.

"I understand perfectly, but I'm afraid it's out of the question," I said.

But Tiella's mind was already made up.

"You told me this evening that you had nothing to do this weekend," she insisted.

"Then it's all fixed," Peter quickly chimed in. "We can all pile into my car."

"How many is all?" Tiella asked.

"You, Tony, my secretary and an English friend of mine, who's staying with me and, of course, yours truly," he explained.

"I see," Tiella said.

"One woman with four men. Do you think it's quite proper?" he asked, giving me a dig in the ribs.

I could not trust myself to answer, and while the two of them chattered over the plans for the weekend, I gave myself up to morbid contemplation of the horror to come.

Peter left us at the entrance of the Excelsior. He was in the highest spirits and thanked me warmly for the dinner.

"The next one must be on me. In Elba!" he added, beaming at Tiella. "Wait till you get a load of those lobsters and some of that red wine!"

At that late hour, my stomach almost revolted at such gastronomic profanity.

Peter bent over Tiella's hand. "Until Friday," he said. "Auf Wiedersehen."

As she went into the hotel, he said to me: "She's quite a girl, and, at first, I thought she was snooty. It should be quite a weekend," he enthused.

"It should be," I said, thankful for the darkness. Then I bade him good-night.

"The Baroness is in the bar, sir," the concierge said, as I collected my key. "She would like you to join her."

I found Tiella sitting on a bar stool displaying her legs to their best advantage and drinking a *fine a L'eau*.

"Thank you for a lovely evening. It was fun," she smiled.

"It was disaster," I said coldly.

She looked distressed.

"Why?"

"Do you realise what you have let us in for? A weekend in some stinking little hotel on the Island of Elba, whither his enemies once sent Napoleon as long ago as 1814, because they couldn't think of anywhere more unpleasant."

"It may have improved," she said maddeningly.

"May I remind you that Peter said it was primitive and, in case he didn't tell you, he was reared on a farm in the heart of Darkest Africa," I said fiercely.

"Pigging it might be rather fun," Tiella smiled.

"For Christ's sake stop using that word fun," I hissed.

"I caught it from your fat friend . . ."

"*Your* fat friend, unless my eyes deceive me . . ."

Tiella lent forward and pinched my chin; a trick that I sometimes found charming.

"Darling, I *do* believe you're jealous," she laughed.

I assured her that I was nothing of the kind and suggested that she might stick to the point.

"But I can't see any point!" she retorted, "unless it is that you're angry because I accepted an invitation for us to spend a weekend by the sea instead of sweltering here in Florence? I can't think why you suddenly want to make this fuss. You won't even have to worry about driving," she added.

I gave in with ill-grace. "It was your idea," I told her, "so don't blame me if it turns out not to be—fun!" I gave her a kiss on the forehead. Then I

ordered two last *fines* from the sleepy barman and we sat for a little while without speaking. Then I asked Tiella what she really thought of Peter.

"You mean 'seriously?'" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Frankly, I like him. He's got a frightening inferiority complex. That's why he's so many of the things we said he was earlier on. He's kind, but he could be awfully ruthless. I'd say he's an unhappy creature, wouldn't you?" she asked, looking up at me.

I told her that I had not thought so before, but now that she mentioned it, I agreed with her.

"So that makes two in the family," I said, and Tiella asked what I meant. I told her about Clari.

"I think I should like to meet her," Tiella said unexpectedly.

"For heaven's sake, why?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "God knows!" Then she finished her *fine* and gathered up her bag.

"There must be something fascinating about all of them or why should the likes of us sit up till this hour talking about them?" she laughed.

"God knows!" I echoed, slipping my arm through hers.

CHAPTER FIVE

OF THE weekend in Elba I can recall now but a few salient incidents. Of course, I remember clearly enough how, at the last minute, Tiella deserted me. In answer to a bombardment of telegrams and telephone calls from Rinaldo, threatening suicide, she returned to San Marino.

"There is nothing else I can do," she explained as she threw lingerie into a pigskin dressing case.

"There is nothing else that you want to do," I grumbled.

"That is ungenerous of you as well as ungrateful," Tiella rebuked. "I have behaved shamelessly towards Rinaldo."

I thought of Rinaldo as I had last seen him, his dark eyes smouldering with hatred and his too red lips twisted into a self-satisfied smirk as he watched his confrères mechanically scooping up my chips.

"Bah! *You* behaved shamelessly! I like that!" I said bitterly. "May I remind you of what that creature's ridiculous conduct cost me?"

"Rinaldo is of the people, my dear, and therefore the victim of somewhat primitive emotions," Tiella said archly. "That is why I must go back. There is no telling what he may do if I don't."

Two hours later, having hired a driver, I settled her comfortably into my car, for, after all, as Tiella herself said, I was not using it over the weekend.

So it was that I set out for Elba with Peter, Willie

and young Brookes, without Tiella and grimly determined not to enjoy myself. In fact, I enjoyed myself in an odd sort of way quite considerably. Peter I think was disappointed that Tiella did not come for he had probably boasted to the other two about his beautiful Baroness. But he was in a holiday mood and his exuberant good spirits soon overcame his disappointment.

He arrived to fetch me wearing an absurd little beret and one of those dazzlingly florid shirts made popular by American Senators on vacation. Beside him sat Willie and Ronnie Brookes.

"Now that we've lost the girl-friend, the back seat's all yours. So make yourself comfortable," he said above the blare of the wireless that Willie was switching from one station to another.

Peter drove the big convertible with supreme self-confidence and an almost brutal disregard for its finer feelings. But he drove with forceful skill so that I, who find but little pleasure in being driven, was never nervous. Obviously, too, he loved driving and took a childish delight in overtaking all the high-powered Italian cars we met on the road.

I remember that weekend chiefly because it gave me the opportunity to understand Peter. I think it was the first time that I had seen him completely at his ease. Away from Florence, and therefore away from his office and his parents, he became a different person; altogether more simple and so more tolerable. Of course, he still showed off. He still enjoyed the admiring crowds of village loafers that gathered round the car when we stopped for luncheon, and found pleasure in shouting for two or more bottles of wine when one would have sufficed. He still delighted in surprising garagists and the like with his perfect Italian, when they mistook him for an American and charged him accordingly. Such behaviour was as indigenous to him as his very skin. Like his tic, he could no longer control

it. But he ceased either to pose or to try to impress. He was plainly, crudely, himself, and I liked him a good deal better that way.

There were occasions when his conduct offended my sensitivity, as when he treated the unfortunate Ronnie as a poor relation, handing him lire notes with a malicious generosity, or fawned over Willie, pandering to his moods, so that I found myself likening him to a doting maiden aunt.

So far as Willie was concerned, Peter no longer attempted to hide his complete infatuation. Not that he could have done so for it was too pathetically apparent. I say pathetically because it was so obviously not reciprocated.

Whatever he became later, at that time Willie was just a callow peasant. Of course, he was vain and fully aware of his good looks, just as he was proud of his sturdy body with its broad shoulders and narrow hips. But he was essentially a masculine creature, who found the flattery and adulation that Peter lavished upon him embarrassing and slightly ludicrous. Certainly he was neither designing nor vicious. One felt that he should have been overawed by the wealth and ostentation surrounding him and the fact that he was not, made his relationship with Peter less sordid and more difficult to understand. But for this it would have been all too easy to cast Peter in the rôle of the rich seducer, who had dazzled the simple, peasant youth with his motor car and his promises of a life of luxury. I dare say that was more or less how Peter had seen himself when, as he admitted to me, he had first met Willie a few weeks before in Munich. But the situation had not worked out that way; very much to the contrary. I would say rather that Willie was the seducer. Not in the physical and sinister sense of the word for, as I have said, the boy was not vicious, but by simply being what he was; handsome, normal

and friendly and quite unimpressed by the gorgeous cloak that Peter trailed. Unwittingly, he had enslaved Peter by his casual indifference.

This picture of the obsequious, fat and lascivious elder man enthralled by the impervious, good-looking hobbledohoy, should have been repulsive. Yet it was not. It excited pity rather than disgust. So far as I was concerned, its very absurdity rescued it from repugnance.

Faced with an emotional crisis, Peter desperately needed someone with whom he could discuss his problem. Since he would have thought it beneath his dignity to talk to Ronnie Brookes, I became his unwilling confidant. As long as I could, I avoided becoming embroiled. I had no wish to be forced into the invidious position of taking sides in what Peter coyly called his affaire. Nor did I fancy myself in the thankless guise of a Father Confessor. So I contrived to evade Peter's repeated attempts to confide in me.

But on the last evening in Elba he cornered me. I remember that Willie and Ronnie Brookes had gone swimming and that I had counted on Peter joining them as usual. Instead, when I said I was tired, he offered to remain behind, and laughingly said that the old folk would have a drink while the children bathed. Even so, he seemed loth to let Willie out of his sight and, proposing that we sat on the sea wall, he called to the hotel keeper to bring out our drinks.

It was one of those tranquil August evenings when the sea stretched before us like a sheet of burnished copper and the high rocks, embracing the bay were lost in a nebulous blue haze and the distant voices of the fishermen setting out for the night seemed amplified by the stillness of the atmosphere.

Willie, who had seen the sea for the first time as we rounded a bend in the coast road two days before, was bewitched by the novelty of his discovery. Now as we

sat drinking our wine, he stood poised on a rock, calling to Ronnie to join him.

"What do you make of him?" Peter asked.

Without looking at him, I knew that his face was twitching and that the muscles in his right shoulder contracted spasmodically.

"He's a nice enough kid," I said casually, hoping that such faint praise might discourage further discussion. But Peter, having created the opportunity, was unwilling to let it slip.

"I suppose you know he's perfectly normal?" he asked.

"I should have thought that was obvious to anyone," I answered truthfully, for if Peter insisted in pursuing the subject, I was determined not to make it easy for him.

He shifted his position on the wall, drawing one leg under him.

"I just can't understand him," he said tensely. "He knows what it's all about. He knows how I feel about him. For God's sake tell me why he came?" he cried desperately.

"Could it be that you talked him into coming?" I suggested.

He thought for a moment and then said petulantly: "I wanted him to come. I wanted him to come badly."

"And now he's here things haven't worked out the way you expected, is that the trouble?"

"Yes," Peter said, "that's the trouble."

"Why not send him home before you become any more involved?"

"I can't," he said fiercely. "I'm crazy about him. It's a relief to talk to somebody—somebody understanding, I mean."

I lit a cigarette, gulped down my wine and refilled the glass to the brim. If I had to listen to Peter's outpourings, I was determined that I should not do so

cold sober. Half-drunk, the burlesque would be less ridiculous. Tight, one would even be able to consider it with sympathy. I swallowed down the bitter red wine and felt my teeth turn to metal. Then I filled my glass again. The figures of Willie and Ronnie Brookes, silhouetted against the sunset, became blurred at the edges. By closing one eye I was able to bring them back into focus.

"You see," Peter was saying, "I want to settle down. I'm sick of being promiscuous. I'm fed up with all the lousy little bits of rent that come running round just for what they can get out of one. What's more, I'm bloody lonely. I hate living alone. It's hell coming back every evening to an empty flat. The very thought of it drives me into picking up someone simply so as not to be alone. Can't you understand that?" he pleaded, his voice trembling with self-pity.

I did not answer, but filled in the moment of silence by having a drink.

"Mine's a strange case," Peter went on. "You see I only found out about myself five years ago. Before that I didn't know what I was. I imagined I was normal and I had to get myself engaged to be married to find out that I was not. Believe it or not, I was a virgin until I was twenty-five!" he added shyly.

There was, of course, nothing in the least remarkable about his case. It followed the same drab pattern of hundreds of other similar cases. He had thought himself in love with a young girl in his neighbourhood, and there was but little doubt that Clari had done her best to foster the idea. Then one day when the girl and he were alone together, Peter made clumsy love to her.

"It was her idea," he told me, "and I felt I had to oblige. It was absolute hell. A dismal, frightful failure and I couldn't get dressed quick enough. I

knew she despised me for not knowing what to do and I guessed she'd giggle about me to her blasted girl friends. So as soon as I could, I went away. I went down to the Cape. Clari thought I was ill and talked Jupie into buying me a car so that I could make the trip. I suppose I was ill in a way. For weeks I worried myself sick over the damned business. I thought there was something wrong with me. Then, one day, I went swimming and met up with Freddie. He was a grand kid, worked in a store in Cape Town as a window dresser and he seemed to like going around with me. We went everywhere together; swimming, driving, cinemas, picnics—the lot. And two days before I was due to go back home, it suddenly dawned on me that I was in love with him. And it seemed quite normal and natural that I should be. I think I was happy then for the first time in my life. I wired the family that I wasn't coming home and stayed with Freddie for another month. We lived together. Does all this shock you?" he asked, giving a nervous giggle.

"Other people's morals never shocked me—only my own," I said.

Peter seemed reassured.

"Freddie and I would have been living together still if it hadn't been for Clari," he went on.

"Why Clari?" I asked.

"She talked Jupie into leaving South Africa. She hated it. That's why we came to Europe," he explained.

"So now it's Clari who's to blame," I laughed.

Peter looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Go on," I told him.

"I couldn't bring Freddie along because Jupie hated him. And since Freddie there's been nobody—nobody serious until Willie."

"And will Jupie like Willie any better than Freddie?" I asked maliciously.

Peter turned towards me, his face twitching. "This time I'm going to lead my own life and if Jupie doesn't like it, well, that's just too bad," he said with a shrug. "Besides, who's he to criticise? Would it surprise you to know that he's having an affair with a girl in a hat shop near us?" he asked.

"What's she like?" I asked.

Peter grimaced. "She's a bitch!"

"A pretty bitch?" I asked stupidly, drinking down my wine.

"In a tarty way, I suppose she is. But it's all rather sordid," he added, so priggishly that I laughed.

"Does Clari know?" I queried.

"She doesn't, but she could."

"Meaning, I suppose, that she will if Jupie doesn't like Willie?" I suggested.

Peter nodded. "Could be!"

"I should have thought it rather dangerous to try those sort of tricks with a man like your father," I told him. "I imagine he could be pretty ruthless."

"I'm not afraid of him," Peter blustered without conviction. "What's more, I'm getting a little tired of being treated like a child by him. One of these days I'll walk out on him!"

"As his son and heir I feel that would be most injudicious," I laughed a little thickly, "most injudicious!" But Peter was altogether too intense to notice that I was tipsy.

"It's an awful thing to say, but there are times when I hate Jupie. There are times when I want to tell him to stuff his bloody money. He seems to think he owns me, and I hate him for it!" he shouted. "If it wasn't for Clari, I'd have walked out years ago."

"It's always Clari!" I said. "And what do you suppose will Clari think about Willie?"

"Clari knows all about me," Peter answered with a touch of defiance.

"You told her?"

Peter shook his head. "I didn't have to. She knew."

I tipped the dregs of the wine bottle into my glass and drank them down as Willie came running from the water waving a broad ribbon of seaweed round his head and shouting: "Pater, see! Pater, see!"

So Clari knew, I thought. Clari knew about the boy, Freddie, in Cape Town, and all the others, the bits of rent, or whatever it was that Peter called them. And soon, I supposed, Clari would know about Willie, that is, if she didn't know already. I felt all at once deeply sorry for her and thought that now I knew why she seemed so sad.

Getting up, I threw the empty wine bottle into the sea.

"I'm rather nicely tight," I said. "Let's have another bottle of wine."

The following morning I had a headache and as Alka Seltzer was unknown in the Island of Elba, I suffered considerably until we reached Laverno. After that, I managed to fall asleep in the back of the car during the greater part of the journey to Florence. I remember waking but once to rebuke Willie for switching on the wireless.

CHAPTER SIX

SOME THREE days after my return from Elba I was walking across the Piazza Republica when I saw Clari seated at her usual table at Gatti's. She waved to me with her fan.

"Vy haf you not been to see us?" she asked.

I said that I had been busy.

"Mit your charming Baroness?" she teased.

"So you have heard about her!" I said, feigning surprise.

"But of course. Pater told me. He said how beautiful she is and how chic. Sit down mit me und haf an ice cream," she invited.

She was wearing a grey dress with a white lace fichu fastened by a brooch in the shape of a cornucopia filled with pearls.

"Und you haf enjoyed Elba?" she asked. Before I could answer, she shook her head and said: "Boot I think not. It must haf been very uncomfortable. That liddle hotel is not good. For Pater it is all right because he is rough, boot for you, no. It vos vell that the Baroness did not go, I think," she added with a twinkle.

"Perhaps," I agreed, "but, nevertheless, I enjoyed it."

Clari lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"That I do not believe. You are just being polite. Mit that German boy you could not haf enjoyed such a trip," she said disdainfully.

A little nonplussed, I did not answer her, but I saw that she was looking at me closely.

"You know that he has to Munich gone?" she questioned. I said that I did not.

"Vell, Gott be thank, he has!" Clari said, closing her fan with a snap.

"Well, that's that," I said, because I did not know quite what else to say.

The old lady sighed heavily and shook her head.

"Toni, I haf so much worries," she said wearily. "All the time I must fight to keep the peace between Pater und his father, und I am so tired. If Pater vood only live at home it vood be so much better, boot he vill not und all the time he quarrel mit his father. For me it is terrible, you know."

"I'm sorry, Clari," I said rather lamely.

"I am not young any more und my 'cart is not so goot und I get so distressed mit all these things. Vot, Toni, shall I do?" she asked with an extravagant despair.

What, I thought, can I answer? The sudden and unexpected turn the conversation had taken had caught me unprepared. I had not bargained for being so precipitously taken into Clari's confidence.

"Tell me vot shall I do?" she repeated. "Perhaps you could speak mit Pater. He admires you so much und you are an older man. Vood you then speak mit him?"

"I could," I told her hesitantly.

"I believe he vood listen to you. Mit me he only becomes angry and shouts. I am only his mother und I have spoilt him. Und Jupie has spoilt him also," she said as if defending herself. "He has always given Pater too much money ever since he vos a liddle boy und now Pater thinks he must always do as he pleases. In this vorld no one can do as they pleases. It is impossible to think only for oneself. Und they are so the

same my husband und Pater. Both vant always their own vays und I am the suffer between them. So you see how it is for me?" she said with a sad smile.

I said that I did. I said, too, that I was deeply sorry for her and saw with dismay that her eyes filled with tears. I wished only to make my escape and I think that Clari sensed my confusion for she began to apologise.

"I should not trouble you mit these things. Boot Pater is so fond of you," she excused. "You are all vot he admires. You are English und you vos in the vor und you vere brave. He speaks all the time of you. So you see I know that he vill listen to vot you say," she said with conviction. "Und now ve vill talk of other things," she added, brightening.

But Clari's troubles hung over us like a cloud so that we sat talking of trivialities self-consciously, and I felt that she was relieved when I got up to leave.

"Com you to dinner mit us soon," she said graciously. "Jupie vill be pleased to talk mit you again."

As I walked slowly back to my hotel, I wondered what in the name of Heaven poor Clari expected that I could say to Peter that would in any way help. That I should interfere at all in what was very much a family problem struck me as utterly preposterous. Who was I, little more than a casual acquaintance, to act as mediator between Peter and his father?

I think it was only when I asked myself this question that I appreciated for the first time the singularity of my relationship with the Gerts. It was scarcely a fortnight since I had met them and yet here I was carrying home with me Clari's confidences as though I were an old and trusted friend. Such was the oddity of the situation that I stopped still in the street for a moment that I might better consider it.

First Peter and now Clari, I reflected. So far as Peter, tormented by his private devils, was concerned,

I could more easily understand his attitude towards me. After all, he belonged to a generation that had already destroyed nearly every barrier of convention. But that Clari should have thus taken me into her confidence, appealing to me for help, struck me as altogether extraordinary. Yet what now seemed even more peculiar was that at the time I had thought it the most natural thing in the world that she should have turned to me as she had done. I had, I realised, assumed my position of the trusted friend without giving it a moment's thought.

Was it, I wondered, because one lived abroad that one slipped almost unconsciously into such spontaneous friendships? Could it be that the simple fact of being away from home lead one to abandon one's native prejudice against strangers? Or that one's very sense of impermanence made one less selective and therefore more approachable? I could not be sure. But whatever the reason, the fact remained that this relationship so casually begun had developed into a strange intimacy, so that it seemed that there had never been a time in my life when I had not known the Gerts.

By the time I reached my hotel, this unique relationship between us still exercised my mind. Even now, in retrospect, I cannot understand how it came about. That it should have happened to me is the more remarkable because I am not by nature gregarious. If anything, I avoid the occasion of making friends. I do so neither through churlishness nor shyness, but because of a certain streak of self-sufficiency in my character. So, while I remain faithful to my old friends, I can very well do without new ones. Yet in the comparatively short time I was in Florence, I became close friends with the Gerts. I was not then drawn any further into their private lives or squabbles. At least, not by Clari. Whether she did so from tact or

because she felt she had already said all there was to be said, she never mentioned the problem of Peter again. Not even to ask me if I had spoken to him or not. I saw her several times more sitting at her pet table at Gatti's. Twice again I dined with her and Jupie at the villa. On one occasion I played three rubbers of most acrimonious bridge, partnered by Clari, against Peter and Jupie up at the villa. But as often as I went there I grew to like Jupie more and more. When I finally left Florence, I begged the three of them to visit me at Cannes and they seemed delighted by the invitation.

If only because he sought out my company, especially after the departure of Willie and Ronnie Brookes return to England, I saw more of Peter than of his parents. He acquired the habit of dropping round to the hotel when he left his office, or seeking me out at one of my dining or drinking haunts. It sounds strange to say, but I think he developed a sort of doglike affection for me, possibly because, as Clari had said, I was English and had served in the Royal Navy. He enjoyed talking about the war and his experiences with the South African Defence Force. He was proud of the fact that he had risen to be a sergeant-major in the Supply Branch and had been attached to one of the largest prisoner-of-war camps in the Union. It was there, he told me, that he had learnt to speak his exquisite Italian. Alone with me he was at his most agreeable. Being widely read and much travelled, he was a good conversationalist and seemed content to spend an evening chatting quietly with me. There was no doubt that he was without friends and craved companionship. The small, banal circle of his English-speaking acquaintances in Florence bored him for he was too intelligent and too down-to-earth not to recognise their superficiality. He had no illusions about Cassandra or Rudie or Manolo and the rest of the habitués of

Layland's Bar. He was far too shrewd to be deceived by his spurious popularity with them. He tolerated them because he was lonely, and for the same reason he endured the dubious company of the youths he picked up on the banks of the Arno. All this he told me during those last evenings we spent together. His naivety at such times was almost touching so that the realisation that he had placed me on a pedestal amused rather than embarrassed me. I tried not to abuse that position. Only when he harked back to the subject of his sex life did I state categorically that I considered any such discussion not only invidious but in bad taste. After that, he ceased to talk about it. To his credit, it must be said that he suffered my personal criticism without resentment. I even believe that he derived an odd satisfaction from it for there was a streak of masochism in his make-up.

In the short time that remained to me, I was able to tone down Peter. Tactfully, I managed to get rid of that hideous coral charm which he wore round his neck. I laughed him out of the flashy, American ties and quite firmly rebuked him for his ostentation. I told him frankly that his tendency to parade his perversion was grossly indelicate.

"What you do in private is your own business," I said. "But one should never frighten the horses in the street."

"That's a point to remember," he laughed amiably.

Because he seemed to consider me as a criterion of good manners, I think I was able to help Peter. But, even at the time, I never flattered myself that such help was more than merely on the surface. It is as easy to be wise after the event as it is difficult for me now to see Peter in the same light as I saw him then. So I repeat that even at the time when I was pleased with my handiwork, I believe that I recognised it for what it was worth. I think I realised that nothing I

could do would change him substantially. Those demons of his would always possess him, tormenting him with inhibitions and lashing him with the scorpions of frustration almost to the verge of insanity. I think that I said good-bye to him in Florence knowing that all this was so. Yet so much has happened since then that I cannot be sure . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

I WAS REARED in the belief that I would always be, if not exactly well-to-do, at least comfortably off.

These expressions in common usage in the days of my childhood are perforce obsolete. Their very sound belongs as much to another era as the clop-clopping of a hansom cab down Hay Hill or the ring of a muffin-man's bell in the autumn dusk of some quiet London square.

I do not think I ever really wanted to be well-to-do, because those friends of my parents who I had heard so described appeared as dull and unexciting as their own Sunday luncheons. But to be comfortably off was, as our old gardener used to say, another pair of breeches. For me the expression smacked of a flat in St. James's within walking distance of one's club, or a small gracefully proportioned Queen Anne house, through whose few surrounding acres gently flowed a sparkling chalk stream, well stocked with wily trout. It implied a leisurely life, free from toil, spiced with trips to the Continent, the possession of a pair of Purdie guns, a good library, a decent cellar and a skilful tailor. It hinted at a tranquil old age, cosy with *risque* memories. Indeed, to be comfortably off was a blessed state to be contemplated with satisfaction.

Thus many years of my life were spent in the happy belief that, while I would never be rich, I would not want for money. As a child, I did not understand why this should be, any more than I understood quite a

number of other obscure truths that I dutifully accepted. But when I grew older, I knew that it was from my maternal grandmother, to whom I was devoted because she spoilt me, that I would inherit money. It was known as "The Trust", although, in fact, it was nothing of the kind. Whenever its name cropped up in family debates, I remember that I was secretly reminded of a dog I had once owned. He was a poodle dog and I had painstakingly taught him to balance a lump of sugar on his nose. So long as I said to him: "Trust", he would sit on his hind legs, the sugar poised on the tip of his black, shining nose. At the order, "Paid for!" he would toss the sugar into the air and then eat it. So, because of that poodle dog, long since dead, I came to connect in my mind the words Trust and Paid for, and I do not doubt but that a psychiatrist will discover in this simple fact the reason for my future behaviour hereafter described.

When to my grief my grandmother died, my mother and various maiden aunts lived in security from the contents of what seemed to me that intriguing treasure chest the old lady left behind. I cherished the knowledge that one day, in the natural course of events, I, too, would be allowed to dip into it.

By some quip of Fate, I became entitled to do so sooner than I had expected. For I survived not only the war, but all but one of my own generation of beneficiaries under my grandmother's will, so that the childhood legend of financial safety strengthened with time. Merely by living whilst others had died, it appeared that I would now be more comfortably off than I had been led to suppose. There seemed a possibility that I might even be well-to-do. But in either event, I had nothing to worry about. So far as "The Trust" was concerned, it was administered by my uncle with whom I would have considered it impertinent to interfere. Its income I now knew was

derived from property in Hampstead, which struck me as an admirable neighbourhood in which to own property, provided one never had to live in it.

It was the death of this uncle that obliged me temporarily to leave Cannes for London in the autumn of nineteen-forty-nine. I went unwillingly, for at the time I took but a cursory interest in the family estate. I had grown used to it much as I had to the few ageing relations who lived by its bounty. Ungratefully, perhaps, I took it for granted rather, I am ashamed to say, as I took for granted the little gifts I received from some of those ageing relations on the anniversaries of Christmas and my birthday. Moreover, not for another year would I reap any substantial benefit from "The Trust" and in the meantime I was still living without concern on money that I had inherited from my father. Thus the death of my uncle and the journey to London came as troublesome interruption to my quiet life on the Cote d'Azur. As a result of the war, my health was poor and my chest weak so that the prospect of visiting England in the autumn filled me with apprehension.

I postponed my departure as long as I could, finding excuses for dallying on at my villa. One of my dogs had a cold, my old Italian servant's habitual rheumatics suddenly became a matter for concern, and a friend, living near Grasse, needed my urgent aid bottling the wine from her vineyard. But in the end, I had to go, and in the worst of tempers I drove to Paris. There I found further and more charming reasons for delay, so that I did not finally reach England until late in October.

Driving ashore from the car ferry at Dover on a Sunday afternoon, I was greeted by grey weeping skies swept by a melancholy wind that made the attentions of the Customs officials seem less gracious than ever. Throughout the width of Kent the inns

were closed and the dismal façades of the roadhouses were as bleakly unfriendly as a beggar's smile, so that I drove on my way without rejoicing.

Deep rooted as is my love for London, late on that Sunday evening I found it coldly inhospitable as I drove angrily round in search of dinner. At last, turning into Dean Street, I went to Leoni's, where even during the war one had dined well.

Although it was late, the restaurant was crowded and as I stood looking for a table, I suddenly saw the Gerts. They did not immediately see me. But there they were, the three of them; Jupie, Clari and Peter. With them was a third man who sat with his back towards me.

Clari was the first to recognise me across the room, and I saw her turn and speak excitedly to Jupie. Then, as her face broke into a smile, they turned together and stared at me.

Peter half-rose from his chair, overturning a wine glass as he did so. "For crying out loud, Tony!" he shouted.

The clamour of our reunion made us momentarily the centre of the attention of the other diners for we were all talking and laughing at once.

"Com you must join us," Jupie beamed, clasping my hand.

"Toni, it is goot to see you!" Clari cried, offering me her cheek. As I stooped to kiss it, I saw that the fourth member of the party was Wilfie. Clari must have felt my start of surprise, for she said in a whisper: "You see vot ve haf mit us? Do not say nothing," and gave my hand a hurried squeeze.

Then Peter started thumping me on the back and pushing me into a chair.

"What the hell are you doing in London?" he asked.

"I might ask the same question of you all!" I laughed, looking from one to the other of them.

They looked a little different in London; all a little larger than life, like the players on a cinema screen. The faces of Jupie and Peter, still deeply tanned, seemed to accentuate the leaden pallor of the men at the next table. Their air of affluence, Jupie's silk shirt, the large pearl pin in his expensive tie, Peter's wrist watch with its broad gold bracelet, Clari's modish little Paris hat and the fur cape round her shoulders, were an affront to the drab dowdiness of London still ground down by austerity. Even Willie's exuberant good health and shining cheeks and the unyielding newness of his ready-made blue suit declared an alien prosperity.

As my eyes rested on him for a moment, he looked up at me and grinned.

"Ullo there!" he said and the travesty of his American accent reminded me of a genial G.I.

"Are you surprised to see him?" Peter asked in my ear.

"At this moment," I said, "everything and nothing surprises me. Tell me, please, what *are* you all doing in London?"

"Ve to America go," Clari said, and gave a little shriek of delight at my bewildered expression. "See, now hê is truly astonished!" she said to Jupie.

"Ve com from Florence und ve goes to New York . . ." Jupie began.

"And then to Canada," Peter chimed in.

"That's quite far enough for one evening!" I exclaimed and they all laughed.

"Com, haf some vine," Jupie said, filling my glass. "You needs to compose yourself from the shock."

"Florence, London, New York, Montreal," I enumerated.

"Not Montreal—Toronto," Peter corrected.

"But why this Grand Tour?" I asked.

"It is no Grand Tour; ve go Vest, yung man!" Jupie chuckled. Then they all laughed anew, hugely entertained by my confusion.

"Let Tony order some food before we give him any more shocks," Peter said as the waiter brought the menu.

Clari recommended minestrone and a grilled sole. "There is no meat," she said with a grimace.

"Did you see Rudie outside?" Peter asked casually.

"Good God! is he here, too?" I cried.

"The whole damned family's here—and *both* the cars!"

As I drank my soup surrounded by the Gerts and Willie, Peter told me that they had left Florence for good and were now on their way to Canada, to have a look at it, as he put it.

"Und if I likes it, I shall stay," Jupie explained. "This time I move not again," he added looking across the table at Peter. Clari caught my eye, giving me a private wink.

"But the business in Florence?" I queried, thinking about those splendid offices in the Via Dei Benci.

"I close," said Jupie, bringing his hands together with a loud bang. "They vont me to pay millions of lire in income tax vot I owed them not und ven I argues mit them, they asks for bribes. If vunce I pays these bribes to them, I pay them always," he said, spreading his hands. "So I tells them, 'Vot kind of a fool think you that I am?' Und I closes. I do no more business mit such crooks," he laughed triumphantly. He appeared joyfully satisfied with his decision and obviously harboured no regrets for that gloriously painted ceiling beneath which he had sat in such majesty.

What, I wondered, pursuing the same train of thought, had become of the villa on the hill? What of Jupie's girl friend, or, for that matter, the little fox

terrier? Naturally, one did not enquire. One merely wondered, and the more one wondered the more incredible this extraordinary family appeared. Like magnificent nomads, with their train of motor cars and their wealth and their servants they progressed across the face of the earth with a casual indifference that left me amazed.

Already for them Florence was a thing of the past. They had turned their backs on it. Now, as we sat on at Leoni's they could talk only of Canada. Jupie was full of the enquiries he had made about the fishing and shooting around Toronto, and Peter described to me the niceties of the new car he intended buying as soon as he landed in New York. Only Clari did not seem to share in their enthusiasm.

"Only ven I haf seen it vill I believe it is so goot as vot they say," she told me.

"Wait till you see the shops, Mutti!" Peter teased.

"I like better the shops in the Faubourg St. Honoré," she said, unimpressed.

"Anyway, you'll like the movies," Peter insisted.

"Gee! the movics! Oh, boy!" Willie laughed gleefully.

Clari looked at him sharply. "From where you pick up that so awful American?" she asked.

"Clari, leave him alone," Peter told her, his face reddening.

Willie looked down at his empty coffee cup and bit at his lower lip.

Hurriedly I asked if any of them had been to New York before, and Jupie answered that he had visited it once before the war. When one was young, he said, New York was a city of opportunities. But he did not plan to stay there long. His heart was set on getting to Canada and the fishing he had read so much about. I asked if he intended doing business in Toronto and he shrugged his great shoulders.

"Maybe," he smiled. "Boot Pater must something do, so you know how it is?"

The restaurant was now almost deserted and the waiters stood idly round waiting for us to leave. As Jupie paid the bill, Clari told me that they were staying at the Savoy Hotel and would be in London for four more days. She and Jupie were flying to New York, while Peter, with Willie, Rudie and the baggage and the two cars, was sailing on the *Queen Elizabeth*. It was significant, I thought, how she bracketed Willie together with her chauffeur and the luggage.

Outside in the drizzle of rain, Rudie waited with the big Lincoln. He grinned broadly and said that he had recognised the Rolls, which I had parked across the road. I noticed that he was wearing a smart new uniform and was breeched and gaitered.

Clari turned before getting into the car. "Please, Toni, cum mit me shopping," she asked. "I do not know where to buy things in London und you can show me."

"Com, Clari," Jupie laughed. "Toni has more things to do than to carry your parcels!"

I said that I would telephone them in the morning, then stood aside to let Peter and Willie into the car. But Peter said that the two of them were staying with Ronnie Brookes.

"We'll grab a taxi," he said as the old people drove away.

I told him that the likelihood of doing any such thing was remote and said that I would drive them home.

"Now we can talk!" Peter said, settling himself into the seat beside me. "I'll bet you were surprised to see us and you're still wondering what the hell it's all about," he chuckled.

I admitted I was somewhat confused and suggested that he should begin at the beginning.

"Well, you know *why* we left, so I won't bother with that," he began. "From Florence we went to Germany and then to Switzerland."

"I imagine first to Munich?" I said, glancing over my shoulder at Willie in the back seat.

Peter guffawed. "How *did* you guess! But you're right. In Munich we had quite a show-down. Jupie was all set on going to the States and Canada, but I dug my toes in. I said I wouldn't go unless Willie came along, too. I'm telling you, I meant it! Well, there was one hell of a scene with the old boy. But, in the end, I won."

"I see," I said, keeping my eye on the road.

"Wait a minute! You don't know the half of it yet! It wasn't just as easy as that, not on your life, it wasn't!" Peter said with relish. "You see, before we left Florence, there was quite a little scandal with Jupie's Italian girl friend. She turned nasty. Tried to blackmail him, and the old man was properly scared. This baby had to do all the interpreting for him!" He thumped his chest with delight and gave me a dig in the ribs. "Do you get the big idea? Of course, you do! I had only to drop a hint or two that Clari might be interested in his little *affaire* and the rest was easy. Clari was on my side, anyway, as she didn't want to go without me." I saw him give me a furtive glance. Then he said: "I've shocked you all right this time, haven't I?"

"Slightly," I laughed. "You and the Italian girl friend seem to have quite a lot in common."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Bitchery and blackmail, amongst other things," I answered.

Peter's attempt to laugh did not quite come off. "Have a heart!" he said.

We drove for some way in silence after that. Then, to ease the tension, I asked what Jupie would do with himself in Canada.

"You don't imagine the old man'll just sit on his arse and do nothing, do you?" he said.

"Frankly, no," I admitted.

"He'll be back in business either in New York, Toronto or some place within a month. Probably make another fortune, the old devil!"

"And you?" I asked.

"Oh, I'll just trail along with him for a while," he said casually. "And then Willie and I'll set up in business on our own. How do you think he looks, by the way?" he added, nodding towards Willie.

"Fine," I said, "but where did he learn the American?"

"After he left Florence that time it seems he spent most of his time in the movies with the big idea of learning English, and he had some pal who'd worked for the Americans. That's the result. Anyway, it'll do for Canada!" Peter laughed.

We reached the house where Ronnie Brookes lived, off Pont Street, and as I pulled up, Peter suggested that I should come in for a drink. I said it was too late, pointing out that I had been driving all day.

"I shall be telephoning Clari in the morning. So we may all meet at the Savoy later in the day," I told him.

"How about lunch?" he asked.

I said that I had business to do and Peter laughed.

"The gentleman of leisure doing business—that's a good one!"

Not until the next day did I realise the full irony of his remark.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN MY lawyer's office, near the Law Courts, I sat trying to understand the ramifications of my family's affairs. They seemed to me incredibly involved and remarkably dull because they were almost wholly concerned with the dead. Presiding over the entire dry-as-dust business was the ghostly figure of my great grandfather, whose handsome bewhiskered features—painted by Copley—used to look down at me from the wall of my grandmother's dining room. I had always found the portrait exciting because I knew that the old gentleman had been close friends with Dickens and Thackeray and that as a boy he had run away to sea to sail round the Horn. What I did not know about him until this moment was that he had been married twice with extremely prolific success. A large number of his offspring had become priests and nuns, while the rest—the minority—as if determined to make amends for the family tendency towards celibacy, had bred like rabbits.

The windows of the office were tightly closed against the rain and although the fire in the grate smoked cheerlessly it gave out an intense heat, so that I found difficulty not only in listening to what I was being told, but in keeping awake. In my effort to do so, I concentrated on a lone fly, the survivor of a former season, that kept landing and taking off from my lawyer's highly-polished bald head.

My lawyer was an unhurried man, who chose his

words with more care than he had given to the selection of his sherry, judging by a glass of that wine to which he had pressed me on arrival. Whenever a word or a phrase eluded him, which it did frequently, he hissed the opening bars of the *Eton Boating Song* through his blatantly false teeth. The effect was weirdly scorporific.

I felt that he should have been an archaeologist rather than a man of law, for he appeared to take a macabre delight in opening up family vaults and sorting out the mouldering bones of my ancestors. He had a nose, too, for skeletons in cupboards that when exposed to view revealed that my great grandpapa had not always lived on the side of the angels. As I listened to the droning voice and the bouts of hissing, my thoughts wondered and I became lost in speculation concerning those unknown relations who might or might not still exist as the result of such long forgotten amorous adventures. Such reflections, however irrelevant, were infinitely more entertaining than straining to follow my lawyer's ponderous explanations as to why it was unlikely that I should ever inherit any money. For that, in effect, was what I decided he was trying to do. From the welter of words and the mass of documents which he produced one fact stared me boldly in the face. Whoever else might benefit from the revenues of these ancient estates, I would not.

"What it all boils down to is that I can't expect to inherit a bob," I said gathering up my hat and umbrella.

The mass of porcelain teeth smiled at me with an enthusiasm their owner quite obviously did not feel.

"Come, come, it is not quite as bad as that. Shall we say a nest egg for your old age?"

"The chances are that it will be addled," I said.

My lawyer held out a lean, yellowing hand.

"I hope I have managed to make the situation clear?" he asked.

"Crystal clear," I assured him.

"You are always at liberty to seek the opinion of the High Court, should you feel so disposed. But I must warn you—indeed, I feel it incumbent upon me to warn you—that to do so would be costly."

"Not only costly, but costive," I laughed. But the thin colourless lips closed over the false teeth, so that I regretted my vulgarity.

As I walked through the rain towards the Strand, I knew that I would never be certain why so little remained of the family fortune. Together with a great many other delightful things, it had failed to survive the war. A lot of it, so far as I could make out, had literally been blown away in dust and ashes; simply disintegrated as had my long cherished belief in being comfortably off. Disillusionment is ever a bitter experience, so that I resolved to forget the whole business and determined to adjust my life to suit my change of fortune. Having made this important decision just abreast of the Savoy Hotel, I entered that hostelry to call upon the Gerts.

I found Jupie sitting alone in his suite, reading *The Financial Times*. Clari he told me had gone to the *coiffeur*. Then he hoisted himself out of his armchair and stood at the window looking down at the Embankment.

"It is a bad morning," he reflected.

"A bad morning indeed," I agreed.

"I think we will take an aperitif in the bar. Clari will join us there," he said taking my arm and leading me to the lift.

On our way down, he told me that he had been that morning to Hardy's, buying fishing tackle.

"Ven it arrives you must see. Mien Gott! boot they haf beautiful things there," he beamed excitedly.

"Such liddle rods for trouts that you haf never seen. Liddle jewels they are!"

"How many did you buy?" I laughed.

"Boot von. Boot I think to go back together. Perhaps, this afternoon, no?" he suggested.

"A good idea," I said.

"Splendid. Then ve vill take luncheon at a liddle Hungarian restaurant vot I find und aftervard ve go shopping. That vill be less expensive for me than if you goes mit Clari!" he chuckled.

We found a corner table in the bar and while we waited for our drinks, Jupie swallowed little handfuls of nuts.

"Is it not bedder here than Florence?" he said gaily, and I saw his twinkling eye rest for a second on a pretty brunette across the room. "This morning even in such veather I saw many pretty voman und mit chic. I had forgotten how goot it is to be in London."

When the waiter brought our cocktails, he raised his glass and said: "Com, let us drink to London." Then he asked me what I had been doing and I told him that I had been to see my lawyer.

The old man made a face. "That is not goot," he said. "Boot you chooses the right day. It is never goot to see a lawyer ven the zon is shining. Go always to lawyers and funerals ven it is vet, then they seem not so sad."

"That's sound advice," I said.

"Und now haf anudder of these things.* After your lawyer, you look sad. Are you sad, my friend?" he asked leaning forward and patting my knee.

"A little depressed," I told him. "Things aren't too good."

"They are never as bad as vot they would seem. I tell you because I know," he said wisely. Then he lit a cigar and studied the ring of smoke that he had blown into the air.

"Tell me if you vish vot is wrong for you. Maybe that I can advise give," he said gently.

Because at that moment I was conscious of being alone in the world and the tide of my courage was at low ebb, I began to tell old Jupie the whole story. I am naturally reticent on the subject of my personal finances, probably because, like the drawers in my desk, they are always untidy and so I am ashamed of them, seldom even looking into them myself except in a crisis. But now it seemed easy to talk about them to the old man who listened patiently, nodding his head and giving little grunts of understanding from time to time. I did not even care that he must think me an improvident ass or have an innate contempt for my thriftless manner of living. It was comforting to talk to him.

When I came to the end of my story, he tipped the ash from his cigar into the ash-tray.

"You vere too late born," he said. "You should haf lived von hundred years ago. It is no more possible to live as you vould live like a gentlemen. Not even your Duke from Vestminster can any more do that!" he jested. Then he spoke seriously. "Boot, Toni, you should not haf trusted other people vot haf the looking after of your affairs. That vos your big mistook." He wagged his fore-finger slowly.

I suppose my chastened look amused him, because he laughed and said: "Boot all is not lost already. You haf brains und you knows many influential friends, und you can vork. You know, perhaps vot means that vord vork?" he laughed.

"I have an unpleasant inkling," I answered playing up to his mood.

"You are no more von of the last of the rentiers, my friend!" he teased.

"So Peter told you?"

"Pater told Clari, which is much the same thing as

telling me," he winked. Then he asked me how long I was staying in London and I explained that now my business was finished I intended returning to Cannes almost immediately.

"Und vot then?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. I felt reluctant to admit that I had not the slightest idea how to tackle the problem of my future and so tried not to think about it. To a man of Jupie's calibre such an attitude could only seem hopelessly dilatory.

"From rentier you become a beachcomber," he admonished. "It is none of my business, Toni, boot I think you should seriously consider your situation. It is not easy for a man of your age to change his ways. That I know, boot make the decision und make it quick," he advised.

"I haven't your courage," I laughed, thinking of the dispatch with which the old man had concluded his business in Florence.

He stubbed out his cigar, as if suiting the action to his words.

"Remember you always vot is finished is finished. Von can not vorry about vot is over. That is vot I am always telling to Clari vhen she cries for the vay things vos before the vor. 'That vay you break your heart,' I tell her, 'und vot for?' You can not have back the old things. Und mit you, Toni, it is the same. I think you haf always lived a liddle mit your head in the sand or, maybe the clouds. Is that hot zo?" he smiled.

"Alas! yes," I confessed.

"So! I vos right. Go you back to Cannes, boot do not remain there. It is no place for you. It is no place for anyone boot old vomans und gigolos. Und now vhen the old vomans haf not money, it is no place more for gigolos," Jupie chuckled. "Com," he said, "ve look now for Clari before she spends all vot I haf

got in the *coiffeur*. Then we had a good luncheon and forget your worries."

True to his word, he gave us an excellent luncheon at the Hungarian restaurant he had discovered in Soho, and as he filled and re-filled my wine glass and regaled me with stories of game shooting in South-West Africa, I managed to forget my troubles.

That afternoon we went to Hardy's shop, in Pall Mall, where Jupie gratified his passion for colourful fishing flies and lovingly handled one rod after another, muttering to himself in German, while the salesman looked on with superb unconcern.

Although I spent a good deal of my spare time in Jupie's company before he and Clari flew off to New York, he never reverted to the subject of my future and I decided that he had forgotten all about it. After all, what I did with my life was no concern of his, and had he not said, in so many words, that I had to work out my own salvation?

I was somewhat surprised, therefore, when Peter raised the subject one evening when we were having a farewell drink together in the Ritz Bar. The next morning he was due to leave by road for Southampton to join the *Queen Elizabeth*.

"By the way," he said casually, "the old man sent a message to you saying that you were to keep in touch." Then he added, almost with acrimony: "I think you might have told *me* about this business of yours."

"I've scarcely had a chance," I said with truth, for I had seen him only once since that first evening when I had dropped him outside Ronnie Brookes' flat.

"You can't blame me for that," he said truculently so that I know that he felt neglected.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "It's nearly four years since I was last in London and I've been pretty busy." Even as I said it I realised the shallowness of the excuse.

"You managed to see Jupie fairly often," he said sulkily. "Anyway, skip it!" he laughed.

"So Jupie told you about my bad news?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I can't think why on earth you told him."

So, I thought, Peter was not only hurt that I had neglected him, but jealous that I had taken my troubles to Jupie. Such pettiness irritated me.

"I just happened to call on Jupie after my cheerful meeting with the lawyer. If you'd been there, you'd have heard the sad story, too," I said firmly. "So stop being so damned sensitive about nothing!"

Peter smiled. "I'm sorry, but you know how I feel about the old man?"

"That happens to have nothing to do with me," I pointed out. "What else did Jupie say?"

"Only that you were to let him know how you get on. He seems genuinely concerned about you," Peter laughed.

"I thought he'd forgotten all about it."

"God, no! The other evening he could talk of nothing else. I've never known him give a damn about anyone before, but he's certainly taken your troubles to heart."

"I must say, I'm touched," I said truthfully.

"You're quite one of the family. I wish I knew the secret."

"What secret?"

"Of how you charm the old boy! Be a pal and tell me how it's done?" he asked with a trace of bitterness.

"I'm very fond of Jupie. I admire him. I'm quite prepared to believe he can be difficult. For that matter, so can you. But, fundamentally, he's a dear. He's essentially a kind person. In many ways you are very alike."

Peter seized upon the compliment.

"Thank you, Tony. Now it's my turn to feel touched," he said. "I want you to know that I'm terribly sorry about this bad luck of yours," he said sincerely. "I can't be much help to you, but the old man can. He's harder than nails, but he's got a soft spot for you. Take my advice and drop the old devil a line."

"Of course I will," I said. "As soon as I know what I'm doing, I'll let you know. At the moment, I may as well admit, I don't even know if there's anything I can do."

"Don't be a bloody fool!" Peter told me. "You can make a packet of money if you'd only give your mind to it. Making money is easy. It's keeping it that's difficult."

"That I've discovered," I said. "Let's have a drink."

When I tried to pay the bar bill, Peter pushed my money aside.

"Start right now trying to keep it," he chaffed. "If you'd only stop being so damned generous, you'd find out who your friends were."

"I wonder if one wants to know," I remarked.

"It's high time *you* found out!" he said, becoming suddenly serious.

As I said good-bye to him on the pavement, he put his arm round my shoulder. "Don't forget me when you start counting up those friends of yours. I want you to know, Tony, that I'm very fond of you."

"Thank you, Peter," I said.

"Don't mention it," he said awkwardly. Then he laughed and said: "Maybe you'd better come to Toronto just to keep Jupie in a good temper!"

"I'll think about it!" I told him. "Bon voyage and good luck."

I walked slowly down St. James's, past Marlborough House, into the park. Near Birdcage Walk I found an empty bench. The night was still and the sky clear.

Through the leafless branches of an ancient mulberry tree the autumn moon dappled the water of the lake. Occasionally a mallard called and the cry of a moorhen pierced the night. Poised on a rock, ghostly and motionless, sat one of the pelicans. I wondered idly whether the earthbound souls of long dead statesmen possessed the bodies of these hideous birds. Then I lit a cigarette and gave myself up to the dismal contemplation of the shambles of my finances.

CHAPTER NINE

THE WAITER swayed to the movement of the train. "Will you take lionised potatoes?" he asked.

"What?" I queried.

"Lionised potatoes with your chicken," the waiter repeated, rocking backwards and forwards on his heels as the train clattered over a confusion of points.

I put on my glasses and looked at the menu. "Boiled, Fried, Lyonnaise Potatoes," I read.

"I'll have Lyonnaise," I told the waiter.

"That's what I said," he grinned. "Lionised potatoes."

"Thank you," I said, bewildered.

"You're welcome," he grinned again, and, balancing his gleaming metal tray on an upturned palm, swung nimbly down the long restaurant car.

A most curious duologue, I thought, as I took a cigarette from my case.

The man sitting opposite to me wore rimless spectacles and a startlingly dazzling tie. He leant across the table, offering his lighter.

"Thank you," I said, steadying his hand against the motion of the train.

"You're welcome," he answered.

If anyone else says that to me I shall scream, I thought. Ever since I had descended the gangway from the *Empress of Canada* to the dock at Montreal, I had been listening to that phrase. In the Customs shed, from the taxi driver, the barber in the Edward Hotel,

from waiters, barmen, shop assistants, policemen and lavatory attendants, I had heard it it seemed a million times. It struck me as at once pert, trite, meaningless, and vulgar. It should, I decided angrily, be condemned to the limbo of unforgivable phrases together with "pardon", "cheerio" and "good-bye for now". Perhaps, I could escape from it by foregoing the common courtesy of saying, "Thank you", a manner of address that I had already noticed seemed to have fallen into disuse in the Dominion.

From the bottle of whisky I had brought with me from the ship, I poured myself a stiff drink and added a little soda. The man in the unquiet tie followed my movements so closely that it would have been grossly inhospitable not to have passed him the bottle.

"Help yourself," I told him.

"That sure is friendly of you," he said. "I appreciate the kindness."

"You're welcome," I told him, chuckling to myself, so that he glanced suspiciously at the bottle and hurriedly tipped more soda into his glass.

"You're from the Old Country?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Over here on business, I guess?"

"No; on pleasure," I told him.

"You don't say," he said and seemed to retreat slightly. I felt his pale eyes behind their rimless glasses watching me furtively and I knew what he was thinking. I had been party to a dozen such conversational overtures since embarking at Liverpool, and all of them had followed the same curious course. When I said that I was travelling for pleasure the reaction of my companions was one of surprise, tainted with suspicion. It seemed that I became an enigma, and a somewhat dubious enigma at that. Their manner suggested that in a day and age when everyone travelled on business, with a dollar allowance and an expense

account, there was something dissolute and not quite respectable in the simple act of paying one's own fare. On board ship, surrounded by business executives, civil servants and salesmen, I felt a useless dilettante, and slightly improper. Particularly so, with a little clique of bibulous manufacturers who were on their way to a trade fair of some sort in Toronto. Collectively, they looked upon me as a pariah. Separately, they extracted an illicit pleasure in keeping company with me. Even the heartily democratic Governor of a Province treated me with a certain diffidence so that I was sure that he had decided that I was a person of importance voyaging incognito. When I begged to be excused from sitting with him and his insipid family at the Captain's table, he never failed to bow to me whenever we met. To travel for pleasure, I felt, had become the prerogative of the under-privileged few.

But was I, I wondered as the train rattled its way across Canada, really travelling for pleasure? I could not answer the question. It simply led me back to that other question that I had asked myself countless times since leaving Cannes many weeks ago—should I ever have started this journey? I was still no nearer to the answer than I had been in Paris or London. Yet, for once in my life, I had not acted on an impulse. I had carefully considered the Gerts' invitation to Toronto for close upon six months before accepting it. I had carried Peter's letter with me up to the mountains above Nice, whither I had gone to ski. I had, so to speak, slept on it until the snow melted and the ski-runs were covered with spring flowers, and the cattle, released from their winter quarters, grazed the young grass. Even when I arrived in Paris, my mind was not made up, and I do not think I took the final decision until I reached London. Then I walked into the shipping office in Trafalgar Square and bought a ticket.

There is nothing significant in the fact that I bought

a single ticket, for I have an aversion to return tickets. I find them unadventurous. On the few occasions when I have bought them, I have never used them, so that they have haunted me like promises unfulfilled. They are dogmatic and to such a procrastinator as myself their very presence in one's pocket becomes irksome. Thus there was nothing conclusive about that single ticket from London to Toronto. It did not imply the cutting of any cables or the shaking off of dust. If it had any particular meaning at all, it was that, when I bought it, I was still in a state of uncertainty. I was free to travel where I fancied; over the border to the United States, or southwards, to Bolivia or Peru. I was not committed to remain in Canada nor yet to return to Europe.

Looking back on it all, I do not think that at the time I had any intention of returning to Europe. Huddled in my corner seat in the restaurant car, dipping into my bottle of whisky and looking out of the window into the darkness, I nursed the exciting thought that I was an adventurer. That I was hopelessly miscast in the part did not in the least alarm me. Being a middle-aged, impoverished and slightly frail adventurer added a piquant touch that I found stimulating. That I was alone in the world, without ties, and obligated to no one struck me now as my blessed good fortune. It was a comforting thought that I was answerable only to myself if at some stage of this journey I reached the point of no return.

Not that I seriously contemplated such an eventuality for, although I had long since destroyed Peter's letter, I remembered its contents clearly. It had been, like most of his letters, sensible, practical and encouraging. It had offered no false hopes, neither had it made any rash promises. "Now that you have decided to work," he had written, "why not try working here? There are less people in the whole of this vast Dominion than

there are in Greater London, so there should be room for a little fellow like yourself! Anyway, while you look around, there's plenty of room for you in this apartment. As I say, Jupie is getting restless and is active on the stock market already! Moreover, the fishing is good. A few weekends ago even I caught a pike weighing nearly thirty pounds! Although he has nothing concrete to offer other than advice, Jupie joins me in suggesting that you visit us here."

This, in so many words had Peter written to me. Weeks later, up in the mountains, I had replied to his letter, accepting his invitation in polite, yet guarded terms. "When," I wrote, "I have outstayed my welcome, I shall probably wander to New York. I have not been there since before the war. Besides," I added, "I understand that English servants are still at a premium and I quite fancy myself in the guise of a butler!"

The man in the dazzling tie had fallen asleep. His mouth was open and his false teeth had dropped so that the pink plastic gums were displayed in a horrible, mirthless grin. He reminded me of a mummified Pharaoh in modern dress.

As the train slowed down, he awakened with a start, flicking the teeth into place.

"Jesus, Teronta!" he mumbled sleepily. Then he got up and straightened his wide-brimmed felt hat. "Thanks a lot for the liquor," he said. "Are you stopping off here, too?"

I said that I was.

"It's a great city. One of the finest in the world and you sure will enjoy your visit," he told me with a burst of civic pride.

I climbed down from the train, marvelling that several days must pass before it arrived at its destination.

In the vast hall of the Union Station, with its garishly lit cafeterias, barbers' and chemists' shops, its

newspaper stalls and its long rows of benches littered with crumpled travellers, I saw Peter and Willie looking for me. Peter was wearing a light sports jacket and a flashy bow tie, and I noticed that he had grown considerably fatter.

The he saw me. "Tony, it's good to see you," he shouted, half embracing me. "So it's really happened. I can scarcely believe it. You're here!"

"I'm here," I said, "and I seem to have been travelling since the world began!"

Willie shook my hand limply. "Ullo there, Tony," He said. He looked thinner and taller than when I had last seen him.

Peter seized my dispatch case and overcoat. "Where's your baggage?" he asked. His accent was now stridently transatlantic.

"If it's not already on its way to Vancouver, I imagine it's somewhere here," I told him.

Peter laughed. "Leave everthing to me. I've got this city taped!" he boasted. "You wait right here with Willie."

He hurried off towards the entrance of a subway, his nose and shoulders twitching, looking like the White Rabbit in *Alice*, only fatter and even more self-important.

"Well, how do you like Canada?" I asked Willie as we stood waiting.

He shifted the gum he was chewing into his cheek.

"I like it okay," he said flatly.

Now that I had time to look at him more closely, I realised that he had not just grown taller and thinner. He had changed from the sturdy peasant into a scrawny, hollow-chested town-bred youth with spots on his face. Like Peter, he was wearing a gaudy bow tie and a sports jacket with over-padded shoulders that was too loud and too long. I found it difficult to reconcile the brash young spiv with the callow

excited boy I remembered racing over the sands in Elba.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic," I told him.

Willie grimaced. "Teronta's a hick town. Ask Pater." The little English he seemed to have learnt he spoke with a heavy German-American accent.

Peter came bustling back, a little red in the face with his own efficiency.

"Everything's fixed. Let's get going," he said taking my arm. "The car's right across the street."

It was a newer and larger car and its huge chromium-plated bonnet seemed stretched in a wide grin so that I was reminded of the sleeping man in the train with the tumbling dentures. To Peter I praised the car highly.

"It's quite a motor car," he said. "It hasn't the chic of the convertible. Then who wants to be chic in this dump," he laughed contemptuously.

"Is it as bad as that?" I asked.

"You've no idea, Tony," Peter said, swinging the big saloon into Yonge Street. "Just you wait. It's about the most provincial place I've ever struck."

"And you talked me into coming here!" I exclaimed.

"Don't get me wrong. You still can have a whole lot of fun here. But you might as well realise right away that Teronta, as these Canucks call it, isn't London or Paris or New York," he explained.

"And how was New York?" I asked.

Peter rolled his eyes heavenwards and kissed the tips of his fingers. "Quel beauté! If only I'd been free!" he cried extravagantly.

A tram, with grinding brakes, halted directly in front of us, and Peter swore lustily. As we moved slowly forward again, he jerked his head to the left. "Our office is just down there in that high building. That's the Stock Exchange."

"How are things going?" I asked.

"Not badly, considering," he told me carelessly. He drove with impatient skill through the dense traffic. "Once we get through this lot, we'll soon be home," he explained. Then he told me that he had arranged for me to stay in his apartment. "You'll be freer that way," he said. "Besides, Clari's pretty difficult these days. She hasn't been well."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It's nothing serious," Peter said. "It's just that she hates this place—can't get any servants and hasn't any friends."

In fact, I thought, the same old story.

"How's Jupie?" I asked.

"Fighting fit," Peter laughed. "He's taken a hunting lodge about a hundred and fifty miles north from here, at a place called Grace Lake. But, don't worry, he'll tell you all about it quick enough. It's too late to call round to their place now," he added, "but we're having one of Clari's special lunches in your honour to-morrow. All the things you like!" he grinned.

We turned into a side road, lined with trees and modern villas, each with its own garden. Before one of them Peter drew up.

"Climb out," he said. "This is where the best people live!"

Peter's apartment was on the first and second floors of one of the larger villas in the road and he showed me over it with pride, leading me from room to room. It belonged, he told me, to an artist, who had migrated to the West Coast, and he was considering buying it. As it had individuality as well as charm, I told him that I thought he would be well advised to do so.

"It rather depends," he said, sitting down on my bed and watching me unpack my dressing-case.

"On what?" I asked.

"On Willie, to start with," Peter answered. "Have you noticed how he looks?"

"I should have to be blind not to have done so. What's the matter with him?" As I arranged my hair brushes on the dressing table, I saw Peter's face reflected in the mirror. The tic, I thought, had grown worse. Now his mouth twisted and his head jerked and strained on his neck. He waited for the spasm to pass before answering.

"Everything and nothing," he said evasively. "I'm hoping things will improve now you've arrived."

I did not see what possible difference my arrival could make, but if it offered Peter any hope, it seemed pointless to say so.

Peter got up and closed the bedroom door. "Listen, Tony, I want you to be nice to Willie."

The utter absurdity of the request made me laugh.

"Really, Peter!"

"I mean particularly nice. Go out of your way to talk to him. You see, he likes you, but," Peter gave a nervous little giggle, "you're rather a frightening person, you know."

"I must say, I wouldn't have thought so!" I confessed.

"Well, you are!" Peter said. "It's your manner. Anyway, I want you to be nice to Willie because he's had a bloody time from the family. The old man practically ignores his existence and Clari treats him like a servant," he said angrily.

"Don't worry. I'll do anything I can to help," I assured him. Anything, I thought to myself, except take sides in the family quarrel over Willie. So far as that was concerned, I was determined to remain neutral. But Peter seemed equally resolute that I should take his part.

"Clari's bound to talk to you about it, and when she does, tell her that so long as she goes on treating the kid the way she does, I shan't go near her. Tell her

that if she's lonely, it's her own fault," he added fiercely.

I lit a cigarette and sat down on the bed beside Peter. Although I had only just arrived, there seemed no alternative but that I should clarify my position, even at the risk of offending him.

"Listen, Peter, let's get this quite straight," I said firmly. "None of this is my business and I don't want to become involved in it. I don't want to be brutal, but I haven't come all this way to take part in a family quarrel. If by just being here, I can help keep the peace, so much the better. If I can cheer Clari up and keep Jupie amused by going fishing with him, I will. If by treating Willie as a human being, I can persuade Jupie and Clari to do the same, I'll do that, too. But you must see that I can't do more than that."

Peter looked dejected.

"I suppose you're right," he said.

"I hate to sound dogmatic, but I'm afraid I am," I told him.

"Anyway, you will be nice to Willie, won't you?" he insisted.

"Why the hell shouldn't I be?" I countered.

CHAPTER TEN

IT cost me but little effort to be nice to Willie. On most mornings of the week he went with Peter to the Gerts' office, down-town, where, I gathered, he was employed stamping envelopes and running errands. Those days when he remained at home, he spent, between meals, sprawled on the sitting-room sofa, smoking endless cigarettes, drinking Coca-Cola and reading paper-backed detective stories. If, as Peter had said, he liked me, he gave no indication of the fact. His manner towards me was apathetic, so that after a few initial attempts to entertain him, I left him alone. He was abysmally stupid and totally indolent. At times, he indulged in bouts of sullen ill-temper because, I think, the atmosphere of tension they created pleased his vanity. Mostly, he remained in a state of lethargy from which he roused himself only to go to the cinema or to attend the weekly all-in-wrestling matches at the Maple Leaf Stadium.

Peter, of course, spoilt him hopelessly. As if to make amends for Clari's behaviour, he encouraged him to do nothing, waiting on him hand and foot. He fussed continually over Willie's health and shared my astonishment that although he took no exercise and ate hugely, he had grown thin. He was concerned, too, that the boy had lost his looks and was for ever remarking the fact so that Willie's vanity was aroused and he spent a great deal of time studying himself in the mirror, sulkily surveying his spots.

Willie's health was a subject that Peter could discuss tirelessly at any time of the day or night. He formed a habit of coming to my bedroom and talking about it. For a while, through my sense of duty towards him as a guest, I suffered these nocturnal visits, listening with sympathy while he attempted to diagnose Willie's inertia or excuse his bad temper.

Finally, my patience exhausted, I determined to put a stop to them. I chose the moment when Peter was concerned by Willie's listlessness.

"How do you account for it?" he reiterated. "What do you think is the matter with him?"

"Peter," I said, "the answer is obvious."

"Then tell me," he pleaded.

"He needs a woman," I said.

Peter's face slowly crumpled and, burying his head in his hands, he burst into sobs.

I struggled desperately against the desire to laugh. I was not being callous, nor did I find the spectacle of the big, fat man, in geranium-red pyjamas, weeping at the foot of my bed in any way funny. I wanted to laugh because the situation was so utterly bizarre. I found it entirely ludicrous that the simple statement of a biological fact could reduce a grown man to a blubbering, frustrated mass of self-pity. But such a situation was too grotesque to be sustained and I ended it abruptly by telling Peter to shut up.

"Go to bed," I said.

He almost tottered to his feet. His stomach sagged over the drawn cord of his pyjama trousers. His face was blotched and tear-stained. He wiped his running nose on his sleeve.

"I shall sleep on the sofa downstairs," he whimpered.

My determination to remain neutral in the family wrangle over Willie forced me into the invidious position of an arbitrator. Clari, as Peter had told me on that first evening, was not well. I was shocked by the

change in her. She had not only grown thinner and older and more querulous. Now she seemed too often on the verge of tears. Her hatred of Canada had already become a phobia with her and she was obsessed by the idea that the climate was slowly killing her. Most of her day was spent sitting over a little electric sewing machine altering her clothes which, now that she had lost so much weight, were all too big for her. She insisted that there was not a dressmaker in Toronto that she could trust. All day, too, she nagged the unfortunate Rudie who, owing to Clari's inability to keep servants, had become house-boy as well as chauffeur.

Her one pleasure was playing interminable games of Canasta at which she cheated quite shamelessly but without avail.

Two evenings a week, we all dutifully played this tedious game for Clari's entertainment. They were bitterly acrimonious sessions to which I looked forward with dread because, to Clari's fury, Willie, who had a natural card sense, invariably won. The card table was, in fact, the arena in which the family battle over Willie raged at its fiercest, with Clari and Jupie ranged against Peter and Willie. It was a struggle to the death and no holds barred and however desperately I tried to remain impartial I inevitably incurred the anger of one side or the other.

Whenever she could, Clari inveigled me into duels at Canasta, for with Jupie away at his office, she was even more lonely than she had been in Florence. In Toronto there were no cafés outside which she could sit eating cassata, and to hoist herself on to a bar stool before the counter of an ice cream parlour would have been a graceless act far beneath her dignity. Sometimes, driven by Rudie in the splendid new Lincoln that Jupie had bought in New York, Clari and I would go shopping or take a drive along the shore of Lake

Ontario and have tea at the Edward Hotel. But she did not seem to care for these excursions any more than she liked the vast hotel, crowded with cigar-chewing business men, which she compared unfavourably to a railway station. So for the greater part of her time Clari sat at home in a state of peevish isolation in her apartment which was spacious, comfortable and, I imagine, very expensive.

Jupie alone remained unchanged. Although he complained that Canada was without culture and the Canadians uncouth, I believe he thoroughly enjoyed pitting his wits against the latter in business. Throughout the week he worked with furious energy in his office high up in the Stock Exchange Building, and each evening came home so hugely pleased with himself that not even Clari's querulousness could impair his good humour.

He had a great contempt for the business acumen of the Canadians.

"They are like liddle children," he told me. "Boot they think themselves so clever. All the time they hurry und rush to no purpose."

Sometimes I looked in at the down-town office. The lift girls, I remember, were painted, plucked and powdered and the lifts smelt of chewing gum and some kind of disinfectant. They shot one from earth to sky at a sickening speed so that it seemed that one's entrails, unable to keep pace with them, were in peril of remaining behind.

Jupie's office was one of hundreds of others in the great building that reminded me of a gigantic steel filing cabinet. Every office, every floor and every doorway was identically the same. It was a swarming ant-hill of commerce, so vast and impersonal that it annihilated one's individuality. To me it was a frightening place.

Men in their shirt sleeves and all wearing glaring

ties and chewing cigars, sat in varying stages of hypnosis before giant blackboards and flickering ribbons of light that recorded the stock prices of the world's markets. They shouted into telephones and dictaphones and at natty little stenographers, who looked like fledgling film stars.

Although the great building was air-conditioned, the air in it was stale and almost foetid, as though it had been used over and over again.

What exactly Jupie did in his office, I cannot be sure. He went there early in the morning and returned home late, and he insisted that Peter should do the same. I sensed that his business was highly speculative and handsomely profitable, for at the time Peter, complaining that he was being driven to the limit of his endurance, went in awe of his father, never daring to question the old man's orders.

As often as I asked Jupie about his business, he would chuckle and say: "Soon I vill relax und then I look round for you. Boot, for the moment, Toni, I haf much to do und I can leave nothing to Pater und Fritz."

Fritz was a friend of Jupie's student days, with whom he had been re-united in New York. He was a round, dapper little fellow a good many years Jupie's junior, who spoke English with a strident Bronx accent. While he was no blood relation, Fritz was treated as one of the family. When they had been young together, the tough, massive Jupie had taken the little Fritz under his wing, fighting his battles for him and settling his quarrels, for after the manner of diminutive men, Fritz was as contentious as a cock robin. Jupie's attitude towards him was one of affection mingled with jovial contempt. Since the little man had a reputation with the family as a Don Juan, having been often married, I suspected that together he and Jupie had got up to a good deal of mischief in their youth, for I

often caught them chuckling when Clari was out of ear-shot. I do not think that Clari cared much for Fritz. Certainly she had made up her mind that his wife, with her fox furs and platform shoes, was bad style, so that neither of them were often invited to the apartment. But Fritz was installed in Jupie's office, in what capacity I did not know. Privily, Peter confided to me that he was something of a black sheep, and although his father had a soft spot for the little man, Peter looked upon him as a tiresome liability, and their dislike for each other was mutual.

Personally, I rather enjoyed Fritz. He possessed that endearing quality so often found in scamps. His urbanity was amusing and, later on, when Jupie insisted that he should come for a weekend to Grace Lake, his frank loathing of the rural scene made me laugh. But Jupie took this attitude of his friend as a personal slight and Fritz was never asked to the hunting lodge again. The old man loved Grace Lake and spent every moment of his leisure there.

On the map of the Province of Ontario, with its thousands of lakes, Grace Lake is so small that it is hard to find. It lies hidden in the woods some hundred and fifty miles north of Toronto. Intrinsically, it is not beautiful because the surrounding countryside lacks the grandeur one associates with lakeland scenery. There are no majestic mountains reflecting their snowy peaks in the still surface of the lake, only gentle hills so thickly wooded that one's sense of distance is destroyed. But it is a paradise of peace, undiscovered by tourists and not even particularly sought after by sportsmen, for, by comparison with the other lakes, its fishing is nothing to write home about.

But, I, too, loved Grace Lake. I loved fishing the little overgrown streams that fed it. I loved rowing across it in the evening light, spinning for bass, or sitting by the side of it on a summer's afternoon doing

nothing except watch the changing colour of its water ruffled by soft cats' paws of wind that whispered through the firs and spruce trees. My happiest memories of Canada will always be associated with it.

To Jupie the lake offered a ceaseless challenge and in answering it he spent a small fortune. If the fishing was not good, neither was it easy. Jupie never really mastered it. But in his attempts to do so, he bought every possible type of rod, tackle and lure that was for sale in the Toronto shops. His patience was as inexhaustible as his pocket book, and he was spurred to greater efforts and further expense by the fact that Willie, reared amongst the Bavarian lakes, always caught fish. At the height of the season, Jupie's jealousy was so bitter that we assiduously hid from him the fish Willie caught and even resorted to burying them in the woods.

Dressed for fishing in jeans, windjacket, rubber thigh boots and a wide-awake panama hat, Jupie presented an elephantine figure. Armed with a battery of rods, landing nets and gaffs, attended by Rudie, laden with tin boxes of flies, lures and spare casts and a bucket of live bait, he would come lumbering down the wooden pier alongside which the punts were moored. Thus encumbered, he would jump fearlessly into the stern of his punt and proceed to lash the outboard motor to life. Then, with the engine at full throttle, in a blue haze of exhaust smoke and with the prow of the punt high out of the water, he would set forth.

When I could tactfully do so, I avoided accompanying him for the adventure of sharing the little punt with him was altogether too perilous.

Beneath the surface of the lake lurked countless snags in the shape of rotting tree trunks which Jupie continually foul hooked, losing fathoms of nylon line and many dollars' worth of gear; and in his fruitless endeavours to retrieve them he was for ever in danger of

capsizing the punt. On the rare occasions when he caught a big fish, the struggle between the two of them was both fierce and bloody, and if it ended in victory for Jupie, he seldom came out of it unscathed. Once, when he hauled aboard a lively twenty-five pound pike, the bottom of the punt became a shambles of broken rods, tangled line and dying minnows, and he returned to the pier like a mighty matador, gory but triumphant.

Often the woods surrounding the lake re-echoed with Jupie's shouts as, with rod bending like a bow, he fought what he joyously declared to be a monster black bass, that was in reality the branch of a sunken tree.

Sometimes, he yelled to me to come to his aid.

"Schnell! Schnell, Toni!" he would holler. When I arrived, breathless with rowing, it would be to find him slumped disconsolately in the bottom of the punt, muttering guttural German oaths at the trailing end of a broken line. But he was ever the optimist, ready to believe in the infallibility of the latest bait until that moment when, at the parting of the line, it joined a score of its fellows at the bottom of the lake.

The Gerts rented two pine-log cabins, or lodges, and a boathouse, where Rudie lived, by the lakeside. The smaller of the two was shared by Peter and Willie, while Clari, Jupie and I occupied the larger. It had a big central living-room, that gave onto a balcony, overlooking the lake. Its beds were comfortable and the armchairs before the fireplace, where in the spring we burned huge, sweet-smelling pine logs, were deep and spacious.

Our days were spent out on the lake and we returned only to eat the magnificent meals that Clari cooked miraculously on the calor-gas stove, aided by Rudie. Although she complained that these weekends on the lake were no rest for her, secretly, I think, Clari enjoyed them. Gradually, she came to love Grace Lake

because, she said, it reminded her of the Tyrol, and the life we led there recalled her girlhood summers spent picnicking by the Danube. But, characteristically, she surrendered to its charm with reluctance, and in the early days scarcely set foot outside the lodge, complaining of the cold. But when summer came and the woods were filled with wild flowers and the lake shimmered in a haze of heat, Clari not only walked abroad but went swimming. Swathed in a white *peignoir* reaching to her ankles, she waddled to the end of the pier and, dropping the robe, dived quickly into the lake. In the water she moved with the grace of a sea-lion and when I first saw her take to it, I was left aghast by her prowess. She told me with pride that as a girl she had won medals for long-distance swimming.

"I surprise you, Toni," she laughed. "Boot ven I vos jung I vos an athlete. I svim und ski und ride. In Wien there vos no voman could ride the Lippizancers mit me. Always, of course, mit ze zide zaddle," Clari added.

"Of course," I said, for the picture of Clari's immense thighs straddling a horse could not be contemplated.

While I was happy during these weekends and holidays at Grace Lake, in Toronto time lay heavily on my hands. I thoroughly disliked the city. Architecturally, with its mixture of modern skyscrapers and gingerbread Gothic university buildings, it was unremarkable. Its untidy streets, echoing always to the clang and clatter of tramcars, became unbearable in summer. But I disliked it chiefly for its dismal provinciality, its rigid observance of the Sabbath and its absurd licensing laws. Throughout the week while Peter and Jupie worked, I had nothing to do and in Toronto it is difficult to find any intelligent relief from boredom.

So at the end of June, I packed a suitcase and, boarding a plane, flew off to New York. There I visited friends, went to the theatre and sailed on Long Island Sound. New York to me is one of the most stimulating cities in the world. The austere beauty of its great steel and concrete buildings, the violent contrasts of sunlight and shadow in its canyon-like streets, the ever-present nearness of its teeming docks, the sudden glimpses of the funnels and masts of ocean liners, the mournful wail of the sirens of the ferries and tugboats above the traffic's roar and the very closeness of the Atlantic Ocean to such boulevards of extravagant luxury and garish vulgarity as Park Avenue and Broadway, I find infinitely exhilarating. To revisit Manhattan after an absence of nearly fifteen years was an experience never to be forgotten. When I was invited to stay in Vermont, one of the loveliest States in the Union, I could hardly bear to tear myself away from New York although the heat in that city had squeezed me dry.

In Vermont, I stayed at a friend's farm in the foothills of the White Mountains, swimming in a little lake and lying in the sun and, in the cool of the evening, reorganising the kitchen garden to suit my native English taste. I drove, too, about the countryside visiting old friends and making new ones. And in going from one hospitable house to another, in attending cocktail parties on lush green lawns and dining in candle-lit Colonial rooms, I almost forgot the existence of the Gerts in Toronto.

What was more, I almost forgot, as I revelled in so much kindness, that I was a poor man who could no longer afford thus exquisitely to live. But when I returned to New York to find a letter from Peter asking me to come back to Toronto, I came, as I thought, to my senses.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"JUPIE HAS bought a printing business," Peter told me as we drove from the airport to his apartment.

"Good God!" I exclaimed.

"It's nothing elaborate, but he's full of ideas for developing it, and there'll be something in it for you. But don't let on to Jupie that I told you. He'll want to surprise you with it himself, and you know how touchy he can be," Peter warned.

It did not seem worth remarking that I never found Jupie in the least touchy. Instead, I told Peter about my trip.

"Christ, you're lucky!" he laughed. "Here it's been the same dreary round. The office to Grace Lake and back to the office. I'm sick to death of it," he said crossly. "And now the big idea is to spend a fortnight up there."

"But what about the printing business?" I asked.

"Apparently that can wait until his lordship's had his summer holiday. He complains that he's tired," Peter said. "If he's tired, what about me, for God's sake? I'm dead! Between Jupie and Fritz, I've nearly gone round the bend in the office."

"To some purpose, I hope?" I queried.

"We sold a whole heap of oil shares over the border," Peter answered.

"Over the border?" I asked, not understanding.

"Yes; to the States. The Yanks are crazy about having a gamble in low price Canadian Oil Stocks.

They play the market just as you people back home do your football pools. We sold 'em packets of stuff. But that's all Greek to you," he laughed.

"I fear that it is," I said. "Anyway, you did well?"

"We've made money, but the strain has been terrific and with Fritz in on the deal I haven't made much. I shall never know why the old man goes on helping that little runt!"

"He happens to be your father's best friend."

"And I happen to be Jupie's son!" Peter said bitterly. "Yet dear little Fritz gets the lion's share and does sweet Fanny Adams!"

"You sound as if you, too, need a holiday," I told him.

"I'm not likely to get one with the family around," he laughed.

When we reached the apartment Peter told me that Willie was at Grace Lake.

"He's happier there and it seemed pointless to drag him back to this hellish heat," he explained. "Besides, he needed to get away from Toronto."

It occurred to me that Willie needed much more to get away from Peter. Never since I had been in Toronto had I known Peter to allow the boy out of his sight so that I marvelled that now he should have escaped to the country for a whole week by himself. What, I wondered, had prompted such a sudden outburst of generosity on Peter's part? Yet was it really so generous to leave the wretched Willie to his own devices at Grace Lake? Would he not have enjoyed himself far more just being allowed out on his own for an evening in Toronto? But I knew better than to raise such questions with Peter.

Since that night when he had wept at the foot of my bed, he had become more reticent about his private life. I confess that I was grateful that this should be so for the more I saw of it, the more misshapen Peter's design for living appeared. It was not,

in fact, a design at all, but a meaningless, emotional doodle. The sooner he had done with it, the better it would be for all of us. But, I reflected, the trouble with people like Peter was that they could never permit their affairs to end except in a vortex of tears. But that was a moment to which one had still to look forward.

Soon after our arrival at Grace Lake I thought that such a moment had come.

I do not think that I ever knew exactly how Peter found out that Willie had been sleeping with a girl from the nearby village. If I heard them at all, the sordid details of Peter's discovery have mercifully been forgotten. But the resulting scene I shall always remember.

I can still see Peter's face distorted with jealous rage as he told me about it. He screamed—screamed is the only word I can find to describe the hysterical pitch of his voice—that he had finished with Willie. I believe, as he stood there telling me about it by the lake, his face white and twitching, that he meant what he said.

"I'll pack the little swine back to his hovel in Munich. And what's more, I'll send him steerage!" he threatened. "I'm through with him. I'm through with being cheated and taken for a ride and being put off with excuses. This time, I mean it," he shouted savagely.

Then his fury collapsed and he began to wail with self-pity. I listened and said nothing, waiting for the storm to pass, secretly hoping that this really was the end of it all.

But I should have known that, even if his infatuation was over, he would never have had the guts to get rid of Willie. He was too great a moral coward ever to have faced the consequences with his parents. To have sent Willie home would have necessitated giving Jupie and

Clari a reason for doing so. To have told them the truth and faced their ribaldry would have taken more courage than Peter possessed. Even to have fobbed them off with the excuse that Willie was homesick or unhappy, would have been an admittance of failure that Peter's vanity could not have borne.

So, for a time, behaving like a sulky cuckold, Peter went fishing alone at the farthest end of the lake or lay in a hammock, slung between two pine trees, reading Goethe or staring at the sky. Then the storm abated and, on Willie's birthday, when Peter presented him with a signet ring that was a replica of the one that he himself wore, the reconciliation seemed complete.

But the signet ring became the cause of further trouble. Jupie, who, as Peter had said, chose to ignore Willie's existence, took exception to the fact that his family blazon adorned the youth's little finger. Imperiously, he instructed Clari to tell Willie to take off the ring. Clari appealed to me. Was it not incorrect that Willie should flaunt the family's crest, she asked?

I felt bound to answer that it was, knowing that Clari would immediately carry the verdict to Peter.

"It is not *comme il faut* that Willie wears your father's blazon," she told him haughtily. "Toni knows about such things, und Toni agrees."

Peter flew into a rage and threatened with knightly anger to throw the ring into the depths of the lake.

What, in fact, he did with it, I did not know, and it was not until some years later that I found out. I know that Peter journeyed to Toronto especially to buy another ring for Willie who, by then restored to favour, was wearing a martyr's crown.

But the incident remains in my mind chiefly because it incited Jupie at the height of his indignation and privily to me to refer to Willie as "a —— liddle

nancy-boy." It was the only occasion when I ever heard the old man use foul language or mention Willie's name.

The summer holiday on Grace Lake began to drag. As the weather grew hotter, the fishing deteriorated and swarms of mosquitos drove us from the lake as soon as the sun set and the fish started rising. Even Jupie's enthusiasm flagged when the repellents he poured over himself and the cigars he smoked were of no avail against the clouds of insects that tormented him. None of us was sorry when the time came to return to Toronto.

I drove back, I remember, with Jupie and on the journey he talked about the printing business.

"It is boot a liddle place und very dirty," he told me with a chuckle. "Now it belongs by a Canadian fellow vot has no ideas. Boot I vill make something of it. I vill start to print directories. I find out that there are no directories for doctor und dentists und professional peoples und so I make. I make them for each town und in each directory ve vill sell advertisements to tradesmens. It is a goot business und you und Pater can do something mit. Liddle by liddle, it vill grow. Boot do not be disappointed ven you see it for it looks like hell!"

The Mason Printing Company, as the business was called, occupied the ground floor of a small building off Blore Street, and I could not think how Jupie had discovered its existence until Peter told me that the old man had seen the business advertised for sale in the newspaper. Its owner was a jobbing printer who wished to retire, and I should think that as Jupie seemed so pleased with his purchase he had bought it at a bargain price.

The day after our return from Grace Lake, Jupie took me to see his latest acquisition. Standing in the middle of the shop he looked disdainfully around him.

"Everything must be made new. All vot ve not vant must be put out. To-day I buy new furnishings for the office und ve make this look like a proper business so that ve feel not ashamed vhen customers com—if they com at all," he added with a laugh.

The seedy-looking man in his shirt sleeves, whom I took to be the printer, kept glancing at Jupie while he busied himself over a tray of type, wondering, I supposed, whether the imposing gentleman in the immaculate grey suit who was his new boss would put him out with the things that were not wanted.

We were joined presently by Fritz. He hesitated in the doorway, looking round the untidy, shabby room. Then he burst out laughing.

"Vot you find so funny?" Jupie demanded challengingly.

"Not a thing," Fritz assured him.

"Then vhy stand you there laughing? Only people vot are soft in the head laugh at nothings," Jupie told him sharply.

Fritz's shrewd little eyes seemed to put a price to everything. He made a click-clicking noise with his tongue against his teeth. Jupie scowled at him darkly.

"Now vot is it?" he asked.

"Oh boy! You sure have bought yourself a dump!" Fritz said. "How much did you give for this load of crap?"

Jupie's face reddened.

"That is my business. Vhy not mind you yours?" he retorted.

But Fritz was in a teasing mood.

"I'm sure glad it ain't my business," he said shaking his head slowly. "I'd just hate to spend my good money on stuff like this." He ran the tip of a manicured finger along the edge of a desk, regarding the dirt it gathered fastidiously.

"Since vhen vos your money goot?" Jupie laughed.

spitefully. "Just because I make for him some money in oil shares, he thinks he is now a millionaire," he told me, looking at Fritz. "Vhy com you here?" he asked him. "Look you for vork? Are you again broke already? Perhaps, that yung vife of yours spends all your money, no?" The old man's chaff was tinged with malice. But Fritz only smiled and winked at me. No one knew better than he how to provoke Jupie to the edge of anger.

"Whenever Jupie's bored, he buys a printing business," he told me, carefully wiping a chair with a sheet of newspaper before sitting down on it. "Many years ago he bought such a business in Berlin. A swell joint, not like this dump," he explained, glancing at Jupie as if to gauge the effect of his words. "He was quite a young guy in those days and he thought he knew all there was to know about printing. Do you remember, Jupie?"

"Himmel! Shall I forget how in von veeck while I vos in Hamburg you ruined my business!" Jupie shouted. "In von veeck, Toni, he destroy all vot I build up. That veeck cost me thousands of marks!"

Fritz leant back in his chair and looked at Jupie's angry face.

"All that money would have been lost anyway," he defended. "It was a hick business. I saved you wasting any more. You should have been grateful to me."

When Fritz left us, Jupie grumbled to me about him.

"Always it is the same mit that boy," he told me, "I make money for him, then he spends it on vomens or he gets mixed up mit crooks und in trouble. Und I must suffer because I must look after him," he sighed.

And now, Jupie told me, Fritz planned to go to Venezuela. "He says it is a country full mit opportunities. Boot, you vill see, he vill everything lose," Jupie predicted. "The boy vill never learn. It would

be better that he here remained und for me much cheaper."

But if Fritz really did mean to go to Venezuela, he seemed in no hurry to leave. Almost every day he dropped in at the office and wandered from room to room inspecting the changes Jupie was making.

He seemed amused and puzzled by the whole undertaking and, I confess, I was in sympathy with him. I could not for the life of me see why Jupie really had bought the business. He was still far too occupied with his down-town office to devote time to the Mason Printing Company. Even when he had equipped an office for himself in the building, choosing a large leather-topped desk and a big swivel chair, he seldom occupied it. When Peter produced the dummy copies of the directories for his approval, the old man scarcely bothered to look at them. He came at odd times and stood in the middle of the printing shop, watching Willie learning to handle the machines and to set type, smiling inscrutably to himself. Then, taking Fritz with him, he would depart in the Lincoln to his other office.

Peter optimistically interpreted his father's indifference as a sign that he was content to leave the running of the business in our hands.

"You'll see," he said enthusiastically, "we'll make a go of it. It's just a question of getting things organised."

But, frankly, I did not share his enthusiasm. Like Fritz, I could not see how the little business could be developed into a money-making concern unless Jupie was prepared to sink capital into it, and I confided my doubts to Peter. But he merely pooh-poohed them, telling me that he had turned just such a business into a success in Johannesburg.

But, by now, I was growing impatient for I realised that I was still no nearer to making a living than I had been nearly six months ago when I had arrived in

Toronto. What was more, I was considerably poorer as the result of my journeyings and the months of idleness. Perhaps, I told myself, I lacked Peter's business vision when it came to foreseeing the future of the Mason Printing Company. But I could not believe that there was any prospect of the firm making money for many months to come, and until it did I could not expect to be paid a salary.

My job, Peter explained, would be that of an advertising manager. "Once we get going, you should do damned well in commission," he said, "and with your personality you'll find it easy enough to talk these Canucks into buying space in the directories."

Until such time as we did get going there was nothing for me to do. That year, Toronto enjoyed an Indian Summer. The city sweltered in the humid heat and I began to toy with the idea of returning to Vermont. I think in my heart I knew that whatever happened to the Mason Printing Company or however successful I might be as an advertising manager, I could never settle in Toronto. I knew that the provincial way of life was not for me, no matter how luxuriously I might live it. No amount of money that I could earn would compensate me for the narrowness of the social outlook. Even to contemplate my future under such conditions filled me with a sense of panic.

Peter, I think, recognised my misgivings for he was for ever begging me to be patient and did his best to relieve my restlessness.

He pressed me to take his car and drive where I wished, urging me to return for a while to Grace Lake.

"On your own, you'll enjoy it up there," he argued.

When I told him that I might go back to Vermont, he was genuinely distressed.

"You can't walk out on me now. After all, you've waited all these months, so you may as well hang on a bit longer," he reasoned. "Give the Mason Printing

Company a chance." Then he laughed and said that I had been spending too much time listening to his mother's views on Canada.

"She's been talking to you," he said. "Telling you what this town's like in the winter. You might as well admit it, because I know."

"Of course she has," I confessed, "and I must say that she doesn't make it sound exactly alluring!"

Peter became serious. "Listen, Tony," he said. "You stick around. I know you're bored in this place and I don't blame you. But take my advice and stick around. Unless I'm very much mistaken, something's cooking. So have a little patience," he said cryptically.

"I haven't the slightest idea what the hell you're talking about," I laughed, "but I'll stick around—anyway, a little longer."

CHAPTER TWELVE

I WAS LYING on the sitting-room sofa struggling with an extremely long novel all about a lot of tiresomely neurotic and excessively greedy people in New Orleans, when Peter and Willie returned from spending the evening with Jupie and Clari.

Peter threw himself into an armchair, pulled off his tie and unbuttoned his shirt and called to Willie to bring him a Coca-Cola from the kitchen.

"Christ, what an evening!" He was red in the face and his tic was bad. "You must have had second-sight to have cried off!"

"What was the trouble?" I asked.

"Clari," he said. "She's made up her mind that Toronto is killing her and decided to make a scene about it this evening."

"She's had that on her mind for months. What made her choose this evening to start fussing about it?"

Peter ran his fingers through his hair. "God knows! Who will ever understand what prompts my mother to do anything! Honestly, Tony, there are times when I feel almost sorry for Jupie. He has a hell of a lot to put up with," he laughed bitterly. "It's always the same story wherever we go. *She* wanted to go to South-West Africa and settle on a farm. Then *she* wanted to leave. So we moved to Johannesburg to please her, then *she* cried to go back to Europe!"

"Did *she* want to leave Florence? Did *she* want to

come to Canada, for that matter?" I asked, thinking back to that evening at Leoni's.

Peter did not answer, but shouted again to Willie.

"For God's sake bring that Coke! I'm dying of thirst," he yelled. Then he asked: "Did you ever hear Clari say a good word about Florence? You always take her part, Tony, but, believe me, she would have talked Jupie into leaving in the end."

"She blames you for most of the family travelling," I said. "At least you were supposed to be the reason for going to Johannesburg."

Peter looked incredulous. "Is that what Clari told you!"

"No," I said, "Jupie; he told me that one evening in Florence when I was dining at the villa."

"In a burst of loyalty to his wife, I imagine!" Peter laughed, as Willie came in with the Coca-Cola. Then he appealed to Willie. "You heard what happened to-night, didn't you?"

Willie grinned. "I sure did. Your Momma sure created this evening! She certainly does hate Teronta."

"You see?" Peter said. "There's my witness."

"Well, what was the outcome of it all?" I asked.

"I was waiting for that one!" Peter smiled.

"Well, tell me . . ."

"Willie, fix Tony a drink," Peter said, "and make it a stiff one!"

In spite of his bantering manner, I could see that he was nervous and whatever he had to tell me, he found difficult to say.

"Give me a whisky," I told Willie. "If I'm in for a shock—not too much soda."

"It's not a shock," Peter said lightly. "Just a change of plans."

"Well, out with it!" I told him.

He got up and stood with his back to the empty fireplace.

"Okay," he said. "We're leaving Toronto. The idea is to go back to London."

I knew that he was watching me closely as if trying to measure my reaction.

"I told you to be prepared for a change of plan. Days ago I told you that something was cooking. Well, this is it!" he said with an uneasy laugh.

Willie brought me my whisky. "Does Toni know?" he asked.

"I've just told him," Peter answered. "Maybe, you'd better leave us."

"Okay," Willie said and walked out of the room.

I took a long drink and then lit a cigarette while Peter stood looking down at me. I was conscious of my growing anger and I suppose it showed itself in my face, for Peter said: "I know what you're thinking. I know exactly what you're thinking."

"Then there's no need for me to tell you," I said, struggling to keep calm.

"Blame me if you like, but if you do, you're not being fair. It wasn't my idea that we should leave here. I must ask you to believe that," he said earnestly.

"I do believe it," I assured him.

"It's Clari's fault," he said.

At that moment it did not seem to matter whose fault it was, and I told Peter so. So far as I was concerned, his family had a perfect right to go where they liked. It was none of my business what they did. It was quite obvious that Clari was not well and absolutely feasible that the climate in Canada did not suit her. In the circumstances, the only sensible thing to do was to pack up and leave. Frankly, I said, I could not imagine anyone in their right mind wanting to settle in Toronto.

"We're all too thoroughly European to live here," I said, "and as for Clari, Jupie and me, we're too old to be pioneers!"

"Tony, you're marvellous to take it this way," Peter said awkwardly. "You see, I know how you must feel and although I asked you not to blame me for what's happened, I do blame myself for talking you into coming here."

"Peter," I said, "I hate recriminations. You never promised me anything in Canada. I just took a chance by coming here. I couldn't go on living as I had done and if I had to start all over again, it seemed better to start somewhere new . . ."

"But you've spent a hell of a lot of money," he interrupted. "It's none of my business, but you must be pretty short of cash right now?"

"I can manage," I told him.

"Tell me how," he said, disbelieving me.

"I haven't really thought about it yet," I said truthfully, "but I shall go back to the States. I have friends there and I can find a job of some sort."

"As a butler?" Peter laughed.

"I tell you, I haven't thought about it yet," I said defending my improvidence. "I might start writing again. I might do almost anything. I don't know until I get there," I bluffed.

But Peter was not impressed.

"Why not come down to earth?" he said firmly. "To start with, you have to get permission to work in the States and, believe me, that's not easy."

"It can be arranged," I argued.

"Well, we'll suppose that it can be. Have you thought what it'll cost you living in New York and looking for a job? And where, for that matter, will you get dollars—enough dollars to live on? If I know you, you'll need quite a few!" he added meaningly.

The very sanity of his reasoning irritated me, so that I answered him sharply: "I'll meet those hurdles as I come to them. But, thanks for the encouragement!"

Peter flared up. "For Christ's sake be practical for

once in your life," he said roughly. "And don't put too much faith in all those rich friends of yours in the States. It's one thing to know them when you've got money and can invite them out and give them a good time, but it's another story to start asking them to find you a job when you're broke!" Then as if regretting his harshness, he said: "I'm sorry, Tony, perhaps I shouldn't have said that, but I'd hate to see you hurt."

"I understand," I told him, "and I can quite see that you must think I'm crazy. But I shall go to the States just the same. Apart from anything else, there seems no alternative."

Peter sat down on the edge of the sofa.

"You could come to London with us," he said tentatively.

"The answer to that is, No!" I told him, for vague as my plans were for the future they did not include retracing my steps, if only because to have done so would have been an anti-climax to an adventure.

"Why be so emphatic?" he asked.

"It's hard to explain," I said for it did not seem possible that he would understand that I would infinitely rather face the uncertainty of earning a living in New York than return to London and a way of life to which I was accustomed but could no longer afford. So I answered him flippantly. "Nobody can afford butlers in London," I said.

"Jupie told me to ask you to come back with us," Peter said quietly.

"Jupie?"

"Yes. He thinks you can make a living there and he's prepared to back his belief."

"May I ask how?" I asked incredulously.

"He'll explain it all to you himself, but briefly, he thinks you'd do well in the broking business."

The suggestion sounded so entirely fantastic that I could only laugh.

"I don't know the difference between a preference share and a debenture! So how could I possibly be a broker? It's preposterous. It doesn't make sense."

But in spite of his amused smile, Peter was serious.

"You don't have to know. In fact, you can hire a clerk to tell you that sort of thing. The point is, will you consider coming to London with us provided there's a job for you when you get there?"

"Provided I could do the job, I might. But, frankly, I can't see myself setting up as a stockbroker. No one would take me seriously," I laughed.

"Listen, Tony," Peter said patiently. "I don't have to tell you that Jupie's a brilliant man—he's more than that. When it come to finance, he's a genius."

"That I don't doubt," I said.

"Well, I didn't know it, but evidently the old man has been thinking about going back to London for some time. I suppose, since he decided that he'd have to leave here on Clari's account. There were all sorts of schemes in the wind. Fritz wanted him to go to Venezuela, and I believe he was actually considering the idea at one time. Anyway, thank God, that's off! he laughed. "Now he's dead set on London."

"But why on earth should he want me with him?"

"Because he's fond of you and wants to help you. But not only for that reason, because he's far too astute to let that sort of thing interfere with business. What it amounts to is that you have a name and you know people and those two facts add up to a valuable asset in business. Combine them with Jupie's experience and brains and, incidentally, mine, and you've got the makings of a damned good firm. Do you follow the idea?"

"In a vague sort of way, yes," I told him.

Peter leant forward and put his hand on my knee.

"Well, what about it? Will you come?"

I shook my head. "Peter, it simply isn't my line of country, I'm sorry and I'm grateful to you and Jupie for wanting to help me. But I can't see myself touting for business amongst my friends. Never in my life have I asked a favour of anyone and I couldn't start now."

Peter gave a sigh of exasperation. "How difficult can you get!" he laughed. "No one's asking you to tout for business or to beg from your friends. So try to be reasonable. Before you make up your mind, have a talk with Jupie. After all, it was his idea, not mine. And don't bite my head off when I tell you that he said he would stand you the trip back! And now," he said getting up from the sofa. "Go to bed and sleep on it. In my humble opinion it's a damned sight better proposition than going into domestic service on Park Avenue!" he chaffed.

I went to bed but not to sleep. I lay awake smoking cigarettes and thinking over my conversation with Peter almost until dawn. On the face of it, it seemed more sensible to return to London under the protecting wing of Jupie than to fend for myself in the States. Yet foolishly, perhaps, I had always gone in awe of the world of finance. On those rare occasions when I ventured east of St. Paul's into the City I felt immediately out of my element—a stranger in a strange land—and suffered a curious loneliness. All that the City represented was completely alien to me. The power of its great banking houses, the prodigious wealth of its insurance companies, the immense vigour of the Stock Exchange, the very probity of its ancient traditions, filled me with a sense of puny inferiority. And now Peter had suggested that I should become part of that alien world. I thought of those scores of half-hypnotised men sitting in that great steel and concrete building down-town watching the ticker-tapes until they were reduced to a state of catalepsy, and I

shuddered. I saw myself, red-faced and top-hatted, hurrying down Throgmorton Street and pushing my way on to the crowded floor of the Stock Exchange, and the picture was a nightmare. No, I thought, never the City for me! And having fallen asleep so thinking, I wakened the next morning determined to tell Jupie that I would have nothing to do with the broking business.

After a restless night, I arose late and when I arrived at the Mason Printing Company office, Jupie was already there talking to Peter.

"So," he said, "you do not like to become a broker?" And I knew that Peter had told him of our conversation.

"I'm afraid not, Jupie," I told him. "I know you'll think I'm a fool but, quite honestly, the idea frightens me. In fact, I was kept awake half the night thinking about it."

"What frightens you?" he asked, looking amused.

"Everything. But mostly that I don't understand it," I confessed. "I've never bought a share in my life and I don't even think I'd know how to set about doing so. If I asked you to take command of a ship, you'd have doubts about your capabilities, wouldn't you?"

Jupie looked at me with his eyes twinkling. "Not if you vos mit me on the ship to tell me when I vos wrong."

Peter laughed. "Answer that one!" he challenged.

"I can't," I admitted.

"Well then . . ." Peter began, but his father stopped him.

"Quiet, Pater," he told him. "If Toni does not vont to do this, he is right to say so. If he vood not be happy in the broking business then vhy should he make such business? It is not for us to make him do anything vot he does not vont. Boot leave me to talk mit Toni," he added.

"Truly, Jupie, I think it would be unwise," I told him when we were alone, and felt wretched because I hated to disappoint the old man.

"Very vell. Ve say no more," he said kindly. "Boot I do not like this idea that you haf of going to the States. That is a hard country, Toni. It vood be better if you com mit us to London. I take mit me this liddle business," he said, waving his hand towards the printing machines in the next room.

"You do what?" I asked, not certain that I had understood him.

"I take mit me these machines," he explained. "I cannot buy such machines in London for the price vot I haf paid for them here, so I take mit."

So, I thought with amazement, to the caravan would now be added a complete printing works. But Jupie seemed to consider it the most natural thing in the world to take the machinery with him, for he went on to explain to me that he had told Peter to arrange for its transport.

"And when will you leave for England?" I asked.

"Quite soon," Jupie answered. "Vhen Pater has made the business mit the tickets und such things, I go."

It was useless, he said, to remain any longer in Toronto with Clari in her present state. Once they were settled in London, he believed that she would be happier and better in health.

"It vos a big mistake ever to haf com to Canada," he confided to me. "I should haf known that it vos not the place for Clari. Boot ve live und learn," he said philosophically. "Here I haf made goot business und if I remained I vood much money make. Boot vot is the goot of that mit Clari ill und all the time crying?"

Would she, I asked, be any happier in London? The old man shrugged his shoulders. London, he

said, was to all intents and purposes, Europe, and once Clari was there she would be free to go to Paris or Vienna or wherever she wished. So far as he was concerned, he was firmly resolved to stay in London.

He said again that he was sorry that I was not going with him.

"I shall make some business for Pater in London and you could join him in it. In England you haf many friends und you are English, Toni. In England that is a goot thing to be, boot, in America now I am not so sure!" Then he asked whether Peter had told me that he had suggested that I should make the trip as his guest. He put the question shyly. "I am so afraid that you com not back because you think of the expense. If that should be so you must not vorry. Shall ve say that I make you only a liddle loan und when you vill, you pay me back?" he said with gruff embarrassment.

"Jupie," I said, "that's very sweet of you. May I think it all over and give you my answer later? I haven't your ability to make quick decisions. It took me the best part of six months to make up my mind to come here!"

The old man chuckled. "Then you vos leaving Europe," he said meaningly.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN THE END, I left Canada with the Gerts because I could no longer refute the arguments put forward by Peter and Jupie against going to the States. Moreover, the whole trend of events in that country supported their reasoning. The war in Korea, which had broken out that summer, the quickening tempo of the Communist witch-hunt and the tightening up of the immigration regulations, all seemed to conspire against me by making the chances of finding a job more hazardous than ever. Quite frankly, I think also that I lacked courage to stay behind; a fact that I admit with a certain amount of shame. Had I been twenty years younger and even poorer than I was, I might have done, for instance, as the young chauffeur, Rudie, did. I might have packed all my worldly goods in a suitcase and set out across the border over the bridge joining Canada to the United States by the Niagara Falls, with little else but my pride in my pocket. But I was neither as young nor as brave nor as handsome as Rudie and so I did not go. Had I done so the whole future course of my life might have been different as I suppose must now be Rudie's. What became of him I do not know. He could have returned to England, but when Jupie insisted that both the cars must be sold rather than take them to London, where, as he said, there were other cars to be bought, I fancy that Rudie saw himself as Clari's slave and the prospect did not appeal to him. The family condemned his conduct

as ungrateful, but I confess that I admired his independence and gave him some dollars and letters of recommendation to friends in the States. I hope that such courage was rewarded and that the boy from Bolsano found the young American bride that he always told me he wanted.

So, unlike Rudie, I not only returned to London but I agreed to becoming "something in the City". Precisely what that something would be I did not yet know for Jupie, whilst full of plans when we left Toronto, was still undecided what he would do in London. One of his pet schemes seemed to be to promote a business for running pools on American football and baseball games. The Americans were a nation of gamblers, he contended, and he saw immense profits in the scheme that could be extended to include the ice-hockey games in Canada as well as the States.

With his tremendous energy, it was quite clear that as soon as he arrived in London he would not be content just to set Peter up in business on his own. Besides, we had not been long at sea before I realised that those crates of machinery in the hold were never far from Jupie's thoughts. In his mind they had to justify their existence and I did not doubt for one moment that once they were unpacked they would be made to earn their keep in some capacity or another.

Jupie had come aboard with apprehension and a whole pharmacy of cures for sea-sickness. But since the voyage was smooth and uneventful, he seemed happy to relax. He and Clari waddled round the promenade deck together; she wrapped in furs and Jupie wearing an ulster and a curious little tweed cap that he retained in his wardrobe especially for ocean travel.

The nearer we drew to Europe, the happier Clari became. As soon as we arrived in Montreal, under the influence of that city's good restaurants and smart

little dressmakers' and milliners' shops, Clari had thrown off her ennui. Had it not been for the fact that our passages were booked, I think we would have lingered on in Montreal which is as different from Toronto as is Glasgow from Bordeaux. It is a gay city, uninhibited by narrow-minded restrictions on drinking and the other pleasures of the flesh. We found cafés for Clari to sit in, we took the "five o'clock" at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and drives into the neighbouring country, now a blazing fantasy of red and gold in the fall of the year. Then, having filled Clari's cabin with flowers, we finally sailed for Liverpool.

In London, Jupie and Clari stayed at the Ritz Hotel. I had thought that they would return to the Savoy, but Jupie remarked that it was too noisy for Clari who, in her present state of health, would be more at home in the sedate dignity of the Ritz. Peter and Willie found a furnished flat and I returned to a service suite in Dover Street, where I was accustomed to stay when on visits to London.

As always I was glad to be back. My banking account was less depleted than I had dared to hope, my tailor showed no signs of impatience and I found many friends who seemed pleased at my unexpected return. For a while I gave myself up to the pleasure of being home again. But Jupie demanded action. He must, he insisted, have an office. Sitting uncomfortably on the edge of a Louis seize settee, he stated that he could not endure life without an office.

"Where can I go? Vot can I do mitout an office?" he complained. "I cannot sit all the day long on my backsides mit nothings to do. That vay I shall an imbecile become."

He was highly indignant that the Customs authorities had temporarily impounded his printing machines in Liverpool and blamed the wretched Peter.

"Go you to Liverpool und fetch these things," he

ordered, and refused to see reason when Peter pointed out that until such time as we found accommodation for them, it was as well that they should remain where they were.

"Find me then an office," he reiterated like a petulant child. "Like this I cannot live."

Peter and I visited estate agents and finally found an office in Upper Brook Street that Jupie reluctantly admitted met with his approval.

"It'll do," Peter said desperately. "Anything will do so long as he has somewhere to go in the mornings when he gets up—somewhere with a desk and a telephone. Otherwise, he'll drive Clari nuts and we shall have the Toronto trouble all over again!"

"Anything, anything rather than that!" I begged.

But Jupie had hardly installed himself in his new office and the machinery had finally arrived, when we discovered that the landlords would not grant permission for the presses to be assembled on the premises.

Jupie, in high dudgeon, threatened to leave London.

"How can one make business in such a place?" he fumed. "Where, tell me where can I find an office? I thought, Toni, that you vos at home in this place?" he asked contemptuously.

"At home but never in business," I reminded him, and continued the round of the estate agents with Peter, while Jupie retired back to the Ritz to read *The Financial Times* and complain bitterly that he was losing a fortune because of our inefficiency.

During those first weeks in London, I was the only one who could handle the old man. In my presence he ceased to rail against the petty bureaucracy, the delays and the restrictions that prevented him starting his business, because with his innately good manners he remembered that for better or worse he was in my country. But Peter suffered much at his hands. So

whenever I could, I kept them apart, and while Peter continued to search for offices, I would go to the Ritz and talk to Jupie.

I called one morning to find him brooding over what I recognised to be a Stationery Office publication.

He seemed pleased to see me and, for once, refrained from asking where Peter was.

"I haf been telephoning to you," he said. "I vish to speak mit you about this," he explained waving the booklet at me. "It is of great importance und I haf been much time studying it."

"What is it?" I asked.

"The Act for the Preventions of Frauds," he answered.

"That sounds alarming!" I laughed.

But Jupie was in a serious mood. "Mitout understanding this it is not possible to do business in your country. Therefore, I make a study of it. I mark those places vot are not clear to me und I haf consultations mit my lawyer about them," he explained. "I haf here in London un old friend from Zurich vot is a brilliant lawyer und mit him I discuss this Act."

I was delighted that he should have found something other than the question of an office to occupy his mind.

"It's up to you to understand it," I encouraged, "so that we don't all land in gaol! But why did you want me?"

"Since I study this I find out that a special licence ve must haf before ve start in the broking business. It is better that you shall haf this licence since you are Briddish. It vill save much time. Therefore I vant you to joint vot is called here the Association of Stock und Share Dealers. That vay is quicker than if you go to the Board of Trade vot is all vound round mit red tapes," he said bitterly.

"Why not let Peter join?" I hedged.

"For him it is the same as mit me. Ve are South

Africans und who knows how long it vill take for them to grant such a licence to us? Ve may haf no reason to use this licence boot it is vell that ve should haf it. I vill pay the subscriptions und such things for you und when you interview the committee I vill com mit you, so you haf nothings to fear," he said reassuringly. "So go you now und make the arrangements to join. Unless ve are quick ve shall never be started in business und I haf plans vot vill not wait for ever."

Then he asked the inevitable question as to Peter's whereabouts.

"Looks he really for offices or vastes he his time mit cinemas und such foolishnesses?" he quizzed.

"Jupie, be fair," I said firmly. "Peter is not wasting his time."

Peter found premises in Sackville Street that were by no means ideal for our purpose, but in the face of Jupie's growing impatience they were the best that were immediately available.

A few weeks later, true to his word, Jupie came with me to a meeting of the Committee of the Association of Stock and Share Dealers. The old man impressed that body with his forceful personality. He had, he said, been a member of the stock exchanges in Berlin, Vienna and Johannesburg. He now owned considerable holdings both in South Africa and Canada and under his guidance I would deal in these shares for him. I was his friend and a friend of his son's and for that reason he would back me in business. He was rather magnificent that afternoon and but for him the interview would have been an ordeal. However, with the imposing figure of Jupie beside me, I had, as he had promised, nothing to fear.

In all fairness to the Association I feel bound to say that while they were impressed by Jupie, they made a very thorough-going investigation into my credentials. I appeared to them to be a person of unquestionable

integrity, and they took care to satisfy themselves most meticulously on that score. In retrospect I do not see what possible form of investigation could have lead those gentlemen in the City to discover that I was in fact nothing more than a rather personable puppet that performed to the manipulations of a cunning, adroit and ruthless old puppet master.

"So," he said as we walked through the City. "How does it feel now that you are a broker?"

"I'm not sure," I told him.

"Vhy?" he laughed. "Are you still afraid?"

"Shall we say slightly bewildered," I answered.

"For vot are you bevildered?" he pressed.

"Because of hundreds of things that I don't understand," I said.

"You must tell me vot they are und I vill explain for you," he said patiently. "Boot virst let us find a taxi und then haf some tea."

We went back, I remember, to the Ritz and had tea with Clari and Peter, and afterwards Jupie painstakingly answered my questions.

"It is better that the business should be in your name for it is a goot name und it is Briddish. Here that is important," he told me. He explained that in Johannesburg, as in Florence and in Toronto, it had been his practise to take over existing broking firms.

"Presently," he said, "I may find such a firm here in London, bqot until I do I make business through you und for you und, of course, for Pater und myself. Later, when ve make business und profits, I vill tell you how ve vill share those profits. For the moment, you must understand that this business is like a snow-ball vot rolls down the hill. It start small und it grow. Not quickly at virst—boot it grow. I vill begin mit printing some liddle brochures telling peoples vhy they should buy gold shares. These ve vill send out.

At virst, two thousand, maybe. Boot before that ve haf the opinion of Counsel to make sure that ve do not offend this Preventions of Frauds Act vot is so important. I haf already spoken mit my lawyer on that matter und all is now arranged. Vhen all is made ready, ve take a mailing list vot I vill get und ve send these brochures to professional peoples such as architects, doctors und dentists."

"Why dentists?" I asked amused.

"Because now dentists make much money in this country und doctors also since this National Health vot you haf. So ve send out for a beginnings two thousand of these brochures vot I vill write und you shall see, Toni, vot business ve vill make," Jupie chuckled. "You vill be surprised vot Heckstall-Smith und Company can do!"

"And the football pools scheme? Is that a thing of the past?" I questioned.

"Certainly it is not!" the old man said emphatically. "I vill presently make a special company to promote such a scheme. I make, too, another company for the printing that is separate from your company. Perhaps, boot I am not sure, the Mason Printing Company I shall still call it und that vill promote the football pools. You see here in my head I haf many schemes," he added, tapping his forehead, "und some of them vill prosper mit time."

By mid-November, the printing machinery was installed and Peter had engaged a printer, who had Willie as his assistant. But Jupie expressed himself strongly dissatisfied with the premises. They were too small, he grumbled, and lacked dignity. Moreover, it offended his sense of fitness that there was one of those small, between hours drinking clubs on the ground floor.

"It is not the place for such a business as ours, Toni," he complained. "Something more respectable

ve must vind. Ve cannot receive clients in such a place."

But in the top floor office in Sackville Street, he produced his first brochure. He wrote it, as he did all his pamphlets, in German and Peter translated it before passing it on to me. As it was the first of a series that each client would receive, Jupie had devoted an infinite amount of care to its composition. Of its kind it was a masterpiece and, many years later, I was to hear its brilliance remarked upon almost with envy by brokers in the City. Its purpose was to convince readers of the wisdom of investing their money in South African Gold Mining shares. Not, of course, in the shares of any particular company for to have done that would have been an offence under the Prevention of Fraud Act that Jupie now carried round in his pocket and knew almost by heart. The pamphlet advocated the buying of gold; gold in the ground in South Africa that because of the threat of atom bombs, the Communist menace and the vagaries of the Labour Government then in office, was safer than the gold in the Bank of England.

When I read that first brochure, my admiration for Jupie's agility of mind increased an hundredfold. Not only could it have stood on its own literary merit as a perfectly composed essay, but its insight into the mind of the average British investor was remarkable. When one considered that it had been written by a foreigner, its understanding of the psychology of the British was astonishing. Jupie, who was justly proud of it, beamed with delight when I congratulated him.

"I know nothing about finance, but I think I know good writing when I read it," I told him. "This is not only good writing but damned clever propaganda."

"Und now Pater can start his printings. Two thousand ve make for a beginnings," Jupie said quietly.

It was just at this moment that Fritz walked into the office. Whether Jupie was expecting him, I do not know. If he was, he certainly showed no particular pleasure at seeing him. I suspect that he was annoyed that Fritz should find him in such a small and distinctly dingy office, for he quickly forestalled any criticism by announcing that we would shortly be moving to more spacious premises.

Exactly why Fritz had flown all the way from Venezuela I never discovered. Since he had nothing but praise for that country, I could not imagine why he had suddenly departed from it, leaving behind his wife, with whom he was passionately in love. I questioned Peter on the point, but he seemed as puzzled by Fritz's arrival as I was.

"I suspect that something has gone wrong in Caracas," he said. "Either that or Jupie has written Fritz one of his letters."

"What letters do you mean?" I asked.

"He has a habit of boasting to Fritz. He can't resist it and I was afraid he'd get up to something of the sort all that time when he had nothing to do after we arrived. I'll bet you any money he wrote to Fritz telling him the streets of London were paved with gold," Peter laughed. "He'll never admit it, not even to Clari, but I'm damned certain that's what he did."

"But why?" I asked, laughing also.

"Because that's Jupie. Fritz probably wrote to him that everything in the garden was more than wonderful in Caracas and that he was making pots of money, and that maddened the old boy! So he wouldn't be able to resist writing back a glowing account of his success over here just to infuriate Fritz. Now he'll probably have to give him the money to get home again. I'll bet you he's broke!"

But if Fritz was broke, he showed no signs of it. He

stayed at Fleming's Hotel and seemed content to spend his time looking up old friends in London.

What Jupie thought of it all, I could not make out. He grumbled to me that his friend knew the wrong people in London.

"He mixes again mit crooks," he complained. Then he laughed. "To keep him out of mischiefs, I put him to vork."

The next morning Fritz sat in his shirt sleeves silently folding the pages of the brochures and fastening them together.

"Next wcek I'll take myself on a trip to Germany," he told me.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WE FOUND new offices in Hanover Square, at the corner of George Street.

Jupie's ambition had been to install himself in the City and he was disappointed that we failed to find premises there. But he declared himself satisfied with the elegant late Georgian house looking on to the Square.

"These offices must seem English," he said, "like a club, mit big leather armchairs and goot prints on the valls." And that is how they looked when Jupie had finished with them and the carpets were laid and the curtains hung.

Since, he said, one spent more time in one's office than at home it should at least be no less comfortable. "I do not understand how so many peoples care not how their bureaux look und are happy to vork all day among such ugliness," he told me as he wrote large cheques for the furnishings.

He engaged a pretty little secretary who, with her red lips, tapering eycbrows and black hair tied in a mare's tail, he said looked more suited to dance in the Ballet Russe than to type his letters. He employed, too, a telephonist who sat at a switchboard in the little outer office separating the firm of A. Heckstall-Smith & Company from the Mason Printing Company (London) Ltd.

Organising and arranging his new offices kept the old man in the best of tempers so that he scarcely

seemed to care that the initial response to the first brochure we had dispatched was small. The snowball had rolled but a little way, he reminded me.

"You English are cautious peoples. You think for a long while before you spends your money," he laughed.

I remarked that he seemed considerably less cautious, but he merely leant back in his big swivel chair and smiled to himself.

"Do not worry. I know very vell vot I am doing," he said.

After all that Peter had said about his father in business, I marvelled at the old man's placid amiability. But Peter only laughed when I remarked on the atmosphere of peaceful confidence that pervaded the office.

"Just you wait," he warned. "Wait till the novelty of all this has worn off and he gets the bill for the paper we've bought, then you'll see how he'll start creating!"

But Jupie remained calm, paying the bills without protest. For the moment, anyway, he seemed satisfied that if business was slack it was because Christmas was near and people were saving their money. He blamed, too, the capriciousness of the Labour Government. But when Fritz came to the office and taunted him with having started in business at the wrong moment, he flew into a rage.

"On vot authority do you speak?" he demanded. "Vith vot fools haf you been talking? Do you think that I do not understand my own business after all these years? Why stand you there saying that I haf missed the bus? You sound now like that poor old man Chamberlain!" he jeered.

But Fritz remained adamant. Jupie, he said, was over-spending himself. From the small profits of a broking business he could never hope to recover the money he had invested. Furthermore, times were bad and money was tight.

"Who is saying that I depend only upon broking?" Jupie challenged. "Presently, I shall extend to other things. In the meantime, go you to Germany und see vot business is to be made there. Here you are only vasting my time mit your foolishness. So go you to Germany," he ordered imperiously.

"That means he's standing Fritz the trip," Peter whispered to me. But he admitted that the little man had a nose for business. "He can't organise it, but he can smell it out. Anyway," he added, "we'll be shot of him here for a bit and I'm sick of him hanging about upsetting the old man."

I shared in Peter's pleasure at Fritz's departure, for now that I worked all day long in the office with Jupie, Fritz's habit of baiting him ceased to be amusing.

I confess, too, that Fritz's remarks worried me. One way and another, Jupie had sunk a good deal of capital into the two businesses and, after listening to Fritz, I began to wonder whether the laying out of so much money was justified. I did not doubt that Jupie could well afford to stand the cost of financing both companies until such time as one or the other began to pay its way or he produced, so to speak, some other trick out of his wizard's hat. I was apprehensive lest he could have been too optimistic in his assessment of the future prospects. Yet the more I was with him, the greater became my faith in his judgment. Unlike Peter, who was too easily swept away on the tide of his own enthusiasm, Jupie's optimism was tempered with the wisdom of experience. What he had done before, he reasoned, he could do again. The success he had achieved in Italy, a poor, even penniless country, in comparison with England, he could at least repeat here in London. In the meantime, as he pointed out to me with a mischievous smile, he was making personal economies and sacrifices on behalf of us all. He no longer sported a fast motor car and a

chauffeur and had moved from the Ritz Hotel to a furnished flat in Carrington House.

"Boot liddle bigger than the von vot you haf taken und in not so chic un neighbourhood," he laughed, getting a dig at me for having moved into a little two-roomed flat in Mount Street.

In truth, of course, both he and Clari were happier in a flat than at the Ritz. Now Jupie could go home and take off his jacket and put up his feet on the sofa while waiting for Clari to prepare for him a huge, spicy dinner. As for Clari, now that she had discovered Shepherd Market—"like a liddle dorp", she described it—she was nearer to contentment than I had ever known her.

"She haf already the butcher's heart in her pocket und ve live now all the time on steaks!" Jupie chuckled.

When I dined with them, I found it hard to remember that I was in London, where there was still rationing and such luxuries as unlimited cream and butter were reputed to be unobtainable. But I saw Clari less often now than I had done in Toronto, for she had collected round her a little circle of old friends, consisting mostly of Jewish refugees from Austria, with whom she was quite content to chatter away in her own language.

Outside the office, I saw less also of Peter. Sometimes, he taxed me with neglecting him for my old friends now that I was back in London. I suppose to a certain extent this was true, but, at the same time, he had his own friends and those of them that I had met I did not care for. Like Peter, they spent most of their leisure in the little, ill-ventilated underground clubs that thrive like fungi in the darker recesses of Soho and the Charing Cross Road. I have always found the foetid atmosphere of such places depressing. I dislike their self-conscious toleration of homosexuality almost as

much as I despise the impracticable law that has given such an entirely false *panache* to that commonplace vice. Peter, however, enjoyed these places and frequented them regularly in the evenings, accompanied by Willie whose youthful charm was sufficiently enhanced in such dimly-lit surroundings as to still attract attention. Far from being jealous, Peter took a curious proprietary pride in Willie's popularity and boasted to me about it.

"You should see them," he laughed. "They're round him like flies round the honey-pot!"

Although he never said so to me, I think by now his interest in Willie was on the wane, for I gathered from his casual remarks that he went out a good deal on his own or in company with Ronnie Brookes and a little coterie of friends from South Africa who had migrated to London.

But, as I say, I saw comparatively little of him except in the office. Sometimes, he, Jupie and I would join Clari for luncheon at the same Hungarian restaurant in Soho where we had first lunched on that day many months ago before the old people left for New York. Sometimes, Peter would turn up at my flat in the evening on his way home from dining with his parents. Oddly enough, I do not think he was happy in London. He seemed bored and restless and was for ever bemoaning the fact that he was without a car.

One evening, just after Christmas, when he dropped in on his way from Carrington House, he surprised me by complaining that he was short of money. He was nervous and twitching and kept roaming round my little sitting-room. I made him some black coffee, gave him a brandy and pushed him into an armchair. When he had settled down, I asked him what was the matter and he told me that he had been quarrelling with his father about the business.

It was Peter's job to telephone to those clients who wrote in to us for further information after receiving

the brochures, and to advise them concerning investments. At that time, I remember, on Jupie's instructions, the recommended shares were Blyvoors and Canadian Western Lumber. The former was a gold mining company on whose property, Jupie had been informed by cable from South Africa, uranium had been found.

Peter, who prided himself on his salesmanship, was deeply hurt that his father had accused him of failing to convince the prospective clients of the wisdom of buying these shares.

"He blames me for the fact that business isn't good and says I sound lukewarm on the phone. You've heard me. What do you think?" he asked.

"I'm no real judge," I told him, "but I should have thought that you sounded convincing enough. But what does Jupie want you to do?"

Peter got up and started walking about the room again.

"He expects me to talk to people over here as I talked to the clients in the States from Toronto when we were selling them oil shares," he explained.

"Again, I'm no judge, but I should have thought that one wanted quite a different method of approach over here."

"You're dead right you do! To start with, every living soul in the States will have a gamble in oil, so it's not difficult to sell 'em stock. But I wish to Christ you'd tell the old man what you've just told me. He might listen to *you*."

"I can see no reason why he should," I said truthfully. "And what's more, I don't suppose for one moment he'd discuss the subject with me."

Peter threw himself into the armchair and lit a cigarette.

"That's the trouble," he said bitterly. "I'm the one he grumbles at when things go wrong."

"Are things going wrong?" I asked for the fact that the business was not paying its way was never far from my thoughts.

"If you'd heard Jupie last night you'd have thought we were ruined," Peter laughed. "It's the same old story, Tony. He's certain that he could talk the clients into buying shares *if* he could speak the language and it maddens him that he can't. So he picks on me."

I thought of Jupie's good humour in the office earlier in the day, and asked: "What started this row?"

"I asked him for some money. I consider I've damn well earned it. Besides, I'm hard up," he answered with a touch of defiance.

"Now I'm beginning to understand!" I laughed.

"Understand what?"

"Jupie's attack on your failure as a salesman. When you asked him for money, he decided to take the war into your camp by accusing you of not having earned it," I explained.

"But I damn well have earned it!" Peter repeated.

"That I don't question," I said sincerely. "Your mistake was to ask Jupie when you did. Tact has never been one of your stronger points."

Peter's face reddened.

"I've got to live and so, for that matter, have you," he said roughly.

"There I agree with you. But until the business starts to pay, I sometimes wonder what on," I laughed.

I saw him look at me sharply.

"Are you very short?" he asked.

Instinctively I resented the question although I knew it was well intended.

"I can manage," I said evasively.

"For how long?" Peter queried with a flicker of a smile.

"For long enough," I insisted, refusing to be drawn.

"You're a proud bastard, aren't you?" he laughed, but not unkindly.

"It's a question of faith rather than pride," I said. "Faith in Jupie. I'm prepared to hang on until such time as we do start making money."

"But why go short? Why not have a word with the old man? He wouldn't like to refuse you," Peter suggested.

"And I wouldn't like to ask him. I'm not very good at asking for money," I told him shortly.

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "I repeat, you're a proud bastard. What's more, I know bloody well how obstinate you can be, so we may as well drop the subject."

He got up and looked out of the window.

"Raining again! Christ, what a country!" he said with an extravagant shudder.

"It's probably doing the same thing in Florence. And in Toronto there must be at least six feet of snow. So stop grousing about poor old London," I told him.

"I'd remind you that in Florence and Toronto I rode around in a cosy little car, and here I'm driving home by taxi—if I'm lucky!" Peter moaned.

I offered to telephone for a cab, but he said that he would walk until he found one.

"What it is to be the poor son of a rich father! Well, anyway, thank God for me old mink!" he said with a gay laugh, throwing his raincoat round his shoulders.

I remember returning to the sitting-room and mixing myself a whisky and soda before going to bed. As I sat drinking it, I had a curious feeling that Peter had not just dropped in casually that evening. I could not think why, but I was convinced that not only had he called for a special purpose, but he had brought up the subject of money for a specific reason. I did not believe, to begin with, that Peter was hard up. If he had been, he would never have admitted it to me.

Therefore, I reasoned, he had some particular motive for wishing me to think that he was. It could have been that he was planning to get rid of Willie or even that Willie had finally insisted on going home. In either eventuality Peter could now plead poverty and lay the blame on Jupie's parsimony. Yet if that was his plan, why had he suggested that I should ask Jupie for money? Why, for that matter, had he bothered to make such a suggestion at all? He must have known perfectly well that I would never agree to it. Ever since I had insisted on paying Jupie back the money he had loaned me for my passage to London, Peter had baited me for what he called "spoiling the market".

While I could find no possible justification for it, the conviction persisted that Peter's visit that evening had been carefully premeditated. I lay awake thinking about it until at last I decided that I was being a fool to search for motives that did not exist. This was not the first time that Peter had quarrelled with his father and had come running to me for sympathy nor was it in the least likely to be the last.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

EARLY IN the New Year and shortly after the interview with Peter in my flat, Jupie began to grow impatient at the small response we had received to the thousands of brochures we had dispatched.

"I do not understand vot is wrong," he growled. "Never before has it been so bad as this. Perhaps I do not use the right approach mit these peoples. I am puzzled, Toni—very puzzled."

He paced up and down the room, his hands clasped behind his back, puffing at his cigar.

We were alone in the office at the time, for if Peter had been there Jupie would never even have hinted at the possible failure of his publicity campaign. I was surprised that he should say as much in front of me and that he should have done so indicated that he was worried.

Presently, he stopped prowling and asked for Peter.

"I haf an idea," he said.

When Peter came in from the other office, Jupie took up his stand with his back to the fireplace. Peter, he said, was to take a car and call on all those clients whose names appeared on our books.

"Go you und see these people. Talk mit them und find out vot they are like und vot are their ideas."

Peter looked dubious at the suggestion. "It'll take me a long time as they're scattered all over the country, and it'll cost a packet," he said.

"I do not care. Hire you a motor car und go," Jupie told him.

"But what happens here?" Peter asked, still hesitant.

"Toni und I vill run this office," Jupie smiled. "Und who knows that ve will not do goot business vhen ve are alone?" he added mischievously.

So Peter hired a car and set off to see the clients while Jupie and I sat in the office.

"Now ve vill see vot Pater can do mit these peoples. He is a goot salesman although I tell him that he is not," Jupie laughed. "Did he tell you that he vos very cross mit me the other evening?"

"As a matter of fact he did," I admitted.

"I knew that he vould because I know that he always is complaining to you that I am hard mit him," the old man went on. "Boot, Toni, you haf no idea how extravagant is Pater. Unless I am virm mit him now he vill soon vont again a motor car—a Bentley or some such thing in vvhich he can show off. Und now is not the time for that sort of foolishness. This business und the printing are costing me a lot of money for vvhich I haf no returns seen. Boot Pater thinks that I am mean mit him. Am I not right?"

"Nobody could think that of you, Jupie," I assured him. "And I've certainly never heard Peter say so."

"Boot he thinks so!" the old man chuckled. "That I know. The other night he said that you too needed money. Is that true?"

"There has scarcely been a time when it has not been true," I laughed. "But the situation is no more urgent now than it was a few months ago."

"That I do not quite believe," Jupie said quietly. "I think that I know how are things for you. There is money now in the banking account und so you draw for yourself von hundred pounds. It is all the same whether you do that or if I pay you a cheque. Vhen

the money is spent it is I who vill replenish the account," he added with a wry smile.

Thinking of my dwindling capital, I accepted Jupie's offer, thanking him gratefully. But he brushed aside my thanks almost roughly.

"Ve cannot often do this for ve use clients' money und at any time they may call for it. That is vot I told to Pater the other evening," he said.

So, I thought, Peter was at the back of all this, and felt suddenly annoyed, for I was sure that he had told Jupie that I was in need of money to help his own case.

"Listen, Jupie," I said, "while I don't pretend that I'm not hard up, I can perfectly well manage without that hundred if you would rather I didn't draw it from the account at this moment."

Jupie shook his head. I was to take it, he said.

"Vhen the account is low, I vill put more in again. Boot for the moment there should be enough for our needs for I make no more propaganda until Pater returns to tell me about these peoples. For I am puzzled by this business," he said frowning and harking back to the subject of his precious brochures.

Peter's tour was not marked by any outstanding success. But he returned with several hundred pounds' worth of orders and was quite pleased with himself until Jupie dismissed such a sum contemptuously as "feed for ducks".

Peter's face reddened. "What do you expect me to do—work bloody miracles?"

"I expected you to do vot you haf done—precisely nothings," Jupie told him quietly and continued looking out of the window in a brown study.

Later, Peter, still smarting under Jupie's ingratitude, poured out his feelings to me.

"How difficult can the old devil be!" he cried. "Everyone's to blame but himself. He wrote the brochures, he planned the publicity and now I'm

responsible because they've failed." Then, he accused his father of growing old and losing his grip of things.

"It's time he retired and left the running of this business to us," he said wildly.

"I can't think of a more ghastly prospect!" I laughed. "Or a more direct road to ruin."

For a day or two after his return, Peter sulked and Jupie seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts so that I found every possible reason for being out of the office and was even glad when a heavy cold gave me a genuine excuse for retiring to bed.

A few days later, Peter telephoned me to ask how I was and to tell me that Fritz was back from his trip to Germany. He sounded excited and when I said that I was better, he suggested that I should come to the office immediately.

"Fritz's got on to something good that happens to be right up your street. So grab a cab and come quickly," he said.

At the office I found Jupie, Fritz and Peter all talking at once in German, and I noticed that Jupie had shaken off his ennui and was bursting to tell me the news. As always when he was excited, he was stumping up and down the room and talking at the top of his voice.

"This is something for you, Toni. Something vot you can understand. Something for a sailor," he roared.

"Please begin at the beginning," I begged.

"Fritz haf discovered a paint—un vonderbar paint!" he cried. "How do you call it in English? Mein Gott, boot I haf forgotten the vord!"

"Maybe you better let me explain," Fritz laughed. "Since I've talked of nothing else for the past week, I guess I should know what I'm talking about."

"Well, come to the point," Peter chipped in impatiently.

Fritz explained that the paint was an anti-corrosive paint used by the German Navy during the war, especially on U-boats. It had been manufactured by Krupps and the patent was held by the German Government and kept a secret. When the war ended, the formula should have been handed over to the Allies. Instead, it had been destroyed.

"But one guy, a chemist who had worked for Krupps, memorised this formula," Fritz told us, "and just before he died about a year ago, he passed it on to a pal of his."

"It all sounds very melodramatic and highly improbable," I said.

Fritz looked slightly hurt and Peter laughed. "Don't forget, Fritz, Tony knows quite a lot about ships and the sea," he said.

But Jupie told him shortly to keep quiet.

"I've seen this formula," Fritz assured me. "The guy who has got it is a friend of a friend of mine. He's a funny little guy and scared of his own shadow. I guess he was in some kind of trouble with the Americans right after the war. He was a Nazi, I shouldn't wonder. Anyway, he's got this formula and he wants to sell it."

"Vot you think, Toni?" Jupie asked eagerly.

"What can one think?" I countered. "How can one possibly tell whether the damned thing's genuine. Even if it is, I shouldn't have the slightest idea what it would be worth or whether it was any better than the anti-corrosive paints we have over here."

"Fritz says this fellow told him that the British Navy were trying all they knew to get hold of this paint," Peter said. "Couldn't you find out if that's true?"

"Tell me how?" I asked. "By going to the Admiralty and asking Their Lordships whether they failed in their search for the secret paint used by the

U-boats in the war? I imagine you'd hear the raspberry that I'd get all the way from Whitehall to Hanover Square!"

"Vhy not then tell this fellow that ve vill test his paint und if it is goot ve vill buy it from him?" Jupie suggested. "That is the business thing to do." Then he asked Fritz whether he considered the man was to be trusted.

"Germans are usually to be trusted in such things," Fritz said.

"Now you talk like a fool American!" Jupie shouted at him. "If you start mit trusting these peoples ve vill get novheres."

"You asked Fritz a question and he gave you an answer," Peter put in.

Jupie rounded on him fiercely. "I ask Fritz if he can trust this von man und he answer me that he can trust the whole bloody German race! So vot nonsense do you speak!" Jupie's anger reduced both Fritz and Peter to silence, so that the only sound in the room was the old man's heavy breathing as he paced up and down.

"There is boot von thing to do," he said at last, standing in the middle of the carpet and looking from one to the other of us. "I go myself und see this fellow. I fly to-morrow morning to Germany—to Cologne—und talk mit him. Pater, make you the reservations for me on the plane. I take mit me your mudder. The liddle trip vill do her goot. So take you two tickets for us." Then he turned on Fritz, looking down at him, his lower lip thrust forward pugnaciously.

"If all this is nonsense, I com back und I ring for you your liddle neck," he laughed. "So it is bedder perhaps that you go now back to your vife und wait not for my return!"

He gathered up his hat and overcoat. "I go now

to tell Clari to prepare herself. Pater, bring you the tickets to the flat."

Peter laughed. "I haven't got them yet!"

It was typical of Jupie that it never occurred to him that having made up his mind to go, he might not be able to get seats on the plane.

"Tip you the man und it vill be arranged," he said, brushing aside the impossible.

In the doorway he hesitated, his eyes twinkling.

"Sell you some shares for me while I am away," he said to me, "und spend you not more than vot is in the bank!"

As always the office seemed empty after he had left it.

Fritz sat down in Jupie's chair.

"Jesus! what it is to have loads of dough!" he said, helping himself to one of the old man's cigars.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"THIS is the kind of thing vot happens boot vonce in your life," Jupie declared melodramatically. "If it vorks, our fortune is made."

He held out to me the half sheet of paper on which was written the secret formula for the anti-corrosive paint. He had returned that day after a week in Cologne highly delighted with the success of his trip and greatly impressed by all that he had seen.

"These Germans are vonderful peoples. They are bastards, boot, Mein Gott, they vork hard! Soon they vill seize again the trade of Europe, for how cunning they are, Toni," he laughed. "They fool the Americans into giving them dollars und they laugh at them for liddle children mit too much money. You should see how all the time they are laughing up their sleeves und how rich they all are becoming again."

I gathered that both he and Clari had eaten prodigiously in cafés and restaurants crowded with wealthy industrialists, and that Clari had shopped, buying handbags and nylon stockings that Jupie assured me were far superior to anything to be found in the shops in London. But the culminating triumph of the visit had been his acquisition of the paint formula after many surreptitious meetings in side-street cafés and behind locked doors in hotel bedrooms.

"I promised the old Doctor vive thousand pounds if ve vind that this formula is correct," Jupie told me. "As Fritz said, he is very frightened the old man und

vood only meet me by night und then like a conspirator. Vhy I do not know unless he has been in trouble mit politics. Boot ve haf his formula und now ve test it. First, ve must patent it. This evening I haf my lawyer to see me so that I find out exactly vot to do. Ve must be very careful vot ve do for this is of great value."

I sensed the old man's growing excitement and, as we listened to him, both Peter and I became imbued with it. If this formula was correct, if the paint itself, thanks to its secret catalysis, really did eliminate the use of red lead and yet retained sufficient buoyancy so that it could be applied by spray, then all Jupie's claims as to its great value were more than justified. Such a paint used on ships, bridges and large metal structures would save vast sums of money in time as well as labour. Moreover, it was claimed that it could be applied with equal success to other surfaces besides metal.

Here, as Jupie said when Fritz had first told us about it, was something that I understood; a commodity in the marketing of which my association with yachts and ships could be of the greatest possible value. Even as I listened to the old man talking, I began to think which of my many connections could be used to the most profitable advantage—the head of a ship-building firm, the chairman of an aviation company, old friends at the Admiralty or a close friend in America who owned a chemical manufacturing plant?

Here, at last, I told myself, was a project that I not only understood, but in which I could take a genuine interest. More than that, in promoting such a project I felt justified in approaching my friends without fear of their ridicule. For it was because of that fear that I had assiduously avoided posing to any of them as a share dealer. So much I told Jupie and Peter that afternoon in the office.

"As soon as the paint has been made up, I'll have it put to various practical tests through a great friend of mine who is a power in the world of aviation," I told them. "In fact, I think it would be a good idea to ask him whether he would have samples made up in his own laboratories."

"Before we do anything, we must take out patents for our protection," Jupie repeated. "Then we will form a company to market not the paint but the formula."

We named the paint Leadol and a company was duly formed with Jupie, Peter, myself and a friend of mine as directors. When we had registered the patent, we sent the formula to be made up and tested by three chemists, as well as to the aviation company. As usual when he was enthusiastic, Jupie was impatient for results and worked himself into a state of indignation when the chemists insisted that the formula was incorrect and that there was some quite obvious mistake in the proportions of the ingredients. The office telephone worked overtime with calls to Cologne, not, of course, to the old doctor, who was far too timid ever to be drawn into such conversations, but to a friend of Jupie's who was acting as our agent. But although Peter shouted down the telephone in German, the calls proved fruitless, and Jupie, seething with rage, swore that he had been double-crossed. Finally, I suggested that Peter should fly to Cologne and straighten out the muddle, and Jupie, surprisingly agreed to the plan. After a few painful days of waiting, during which Jupie paced the office and made my life wretched with his grumbling, Peter returned with the complete answer. The errors in the formula, he told us, had been due to careless translation. Now, provided certain ingredients were obtainable in London, we should have no further trouble.

"Boot vot time we haf wasted!" Jupie complained,

and neither Peter nor I dared to point out that it was he who had probably made the initial mistake.

Now all that we could do was to wait for the results and continue with the regular business of selling shares. But Jupie's impatience made him daily more difficult. He accused the chemists of inefficiency and laziness and refused to believe that their task was any more exacting than the mere making up of a medical prescription.

"The longer they take, the more money they get und so ve vill never get this paint made," he argued quite unreasonably.

He seemed haunted by the belief that even my friend with the aviation company was out to swindle him.

"How know ve that he declares the paint no goot und then makes for his own use?" he asked fiercely.

He was dealing with a product that he did not understand and his ignorance of it made him suspicious of everyone, playing havoc with his temper.

"Ring these peoples und vind out vot the hell they do," he demanded each morning, and Peter and I were torn between pestering the chemists beyond their endurance and trying to humour Jupie.

"If this goes on much longer, I shall go round the bend," Peter told me, and he had my sympathy for as usual it was he who bore the brunt of his father's ill-temper.

I did all that I could to appease the old man. I called upon a high-ranking officer at the Admiralty and tried to discover his views on the possibility of interesting the Navy in Leadol. But I did not dare to tell Jupie that this officer told me that before they would consider using the paint on H.M. ships, Their Lordships would in all probability insist on testing it under a multitude of conditions for several years. Also, to placate Jupie I began a lengthy correspondence

with my friend who owned the chemical corporation in New York, who to my delight showed a keen interest in the project. But when Jupie said that he must immediately provide himself with a visa for the States so that he could fly to New York in order to confer with my friend, I was forced to argue that any such action would be altogether too premature. Nevertheless, I used my influence to obtain him a visa and also one for Clari, who declared that under no circumstances would she remain in London without Jupie.

"For God's sake fix them both up," Peter pleaded, "if only to keep Jupie quiet. The longer he has to hang around the American Embassy, the better for us."

But due to the efficiency of that department the visas were provided within forty-eight hours and I had to use all my powers of persuasion to keep Jupie from leaving for America.

"How can you do anything until the samples are ready and at least a few tests have been made?" I reasoned, and with ill-grace he consented to wait.

The summer was by then upon us and the weather was beautiful so that I suggested that Jupie should take a holiday. Why not, I asked, go to Scotland? Why not take Clari down to Wales to a charming hotel that I knew in the Usk Valley that had some excellent salmon beats as well as good food and comfortable beds? But Jupie only shook his head, declaring that now was not the moment for holidays.

Those were indeed trying days for all of us, during which we found but small compensation in the fact that the broking business was gradually improving. Jupie seemed scarcely interested in it any longer except to complain that the business we were doing fell far short of his expectations.

Peter, too, was on edge, not only on his father's account but because Willie had finally decided to go

home. But Peter, now that Willie had made up his mind, determined that the boy was deserting him and decided to make the situation the occasion of a temperamental scene. I refused categorically to be involved in it.

"Let him go," I said heartlessly.

In the end Willie's departure was completely overshadowed by a far more serious crisis. In retrospect, I can scarcely remember the boy leaving or whether I even said good-bye to him. I only recall now that he left at the time when Jupie had a heart attack. Whether this was brought on by a surfeit of steaks, the hot weather or the many delays in the production of the paint, I could not then say. Possibly, it was an amalgamation of all three. But whatever the cause, the old man suffered a partial collapse one morning on his way to the office. That he arrived there at all, pale faced and breathless, was due to his indomitable will and, I truly believe, to force of habit. Had he been dying, I felt that he would have struggled to the office rather than have returned to his flat. Leaning heavily on the banisters and with many painful pauses for breath, he managed to reach the second floor, almost collapsing again on arrival at the office.

"That this should happen at such a time is terrible," he growled, sinking into an armchair and fighting for breath.

I begged him to go home and shouted for Peter, who was in the other room.

"Jupie, you must be sensible about this," I told him. "You must rest. Take a holiday. Go away until the paint is ready. There is absolutely nothing you can do here except worry. So I beg you to have a rest."

The old man was almost pathetically submissive at that moment.

"I will go to Southern Ireland," he said finally.

"I haf seen an advertisement in your paper, *The Field*, for an hotel vot is goot. I shall go there mit Clari."

"But first, you must go home," I said firmly. "I'll send for a cab."

But he refused to leave.

"I do not vont Clari to know about this liddle attack," he said. "She must not know vot haf happened. Only she must think ve go for a holiday," he insisted. "She must not be vorried mit this."

So both Peter and I were sworn to secrecy, and as he recovered himself, Jupie made light of the attack. "It is nothing to vorry about, Toni. Maybe that it is not my heart after all," he smiled.

As a doctor, he should be the best judge of that, I told him, but whether it was his heart or not, he looked ill and I said so quite frankly.

That evening Peter telephoned me to say that his father had decided not to come to the office any more and that both his parents were leaving in two days for Eire.

"He's more sick than he'll admit," Peter said, "I'm with him now helping with the packing. He wants you to lunch with him to-morrow. I've got an idea he wants you to go shopping with him. He mentioned something about riding kit," he added with a laugh.

At luncheon, Jupie announced that he and Clari would go riding in Eire. "At the hotel they haf horses und ve vill ride," he said. "So ve must haf clothes for riding. Where can be buy them at vonce?"

Looking from one to the other of them, I said: "I think you have asked the impossible. But there is one place and one place only in London where they may be able to fix you up."

At Moss Brothers that afternoon, I explained the immediate needs of Clari and Jupi to an unruffled salesman.

"Jodhpurs for the gentleman," I told him. "A riding habit and top boots for the lady."

The salesman took a swift glance at Clari's thighs. "The breeches may prove a trifle difficult," he remarked with a nice sense of understatement that has always seemed to me the essence of English humour.

"I have been a customer of yours for many years," I encouraged, "and I have never known you to fail yet."

"The notice is somewhat short, sir," he said, "but we will do our best."

That afternoon in Covent Garden miracles were worked. Although there was a moment while the salesman fought to remove Clari's riding boot, when my faith was shaken. But, finally, after tailors had been consulted as to the letting out of seams and the putting in of gussets, both Jupie and Clari were equipped for riding.

Would there, I wondered, in all Eire be found two horses mighty enough to carry them?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ALTHOUGH JUPI had decided to take a rest, he was not content to leave the running of the office to Peter and me. Before going, he gave us the most detailed instructions as to what we were to do and said that Peter was to telephone to him every day. He suggested also that he would like us both to spend our weekends with him in Eire.

"That," I told Peter, "I have no intention of doing. In the first place, I don't like Eire and, in the second, I can't afford jaunts of that sort just for a weekend."

"I shall have to go," Peter said reluctantly, "otherwise, the old boy'll only make himself more ill worrying."

So Peter flew over to Eire and returned to report that his parents were disappointed with the hotel. "The fishing isn't good as there's been no rain and Jupie's bored stiff," he told me.

"What about the riding?" I asked.

"They actually found horses to carry them," he laughed, "and I managed to get a photo of them mounted. It should be quite a picture!"

"I'm all impatience to see it," I said.

Jupie, according to Peter, had been to Dublin and had been studying the statistics of the Irish Sweepstake. He had discovered that the biggest supporters of the latter were the Americans and this fact had revived his interest in his football pool scheme.

"He wants you and me to visit all the clients and try to get them to transfer their present holdings in Blyvoors and Canadian Lumber to shares in the Mason Printing Company, which will promote the pools from Eire on American baseball games. If they show any interest, he'll develop the scheme," Peter explained.

"I don't imagine they will," I said, for I remembered with what little success I had once tried at Jupie's suggestion to induce friends of mine to invest capital in this very scheme.

"Anyway, we shall have to try," Peter said. "Whether we have any luck or not, Jupie won't be convinced until we've tried."

But as I had predicted, we motored round England calling upon various clients without meeting with any success and when we returned to London Peter flew off to Ireland to break the news to Jupie.

"What did he say?" I asked when Peter came into the office after his second visit.

"Oddly enough, very little," he told me, but I saw that he looked tired and that his tic was bad, and I guessed that he was understating the case. However, when I pressed him further, he merely repeated that his father had taken our failure calmly. Then he added that Jupie and Clari were leaving Ireland and talked of taking a motor trip through Scotland.

"If they don't find some place there that they like, they may try the hotel you told them about in Wales," he said.

"They seem hard to please," I remarked. Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know what's the matter with Jupie. I've never known him so restless," he said.

But Jupie finally settled in Wales and telephoned, to say that both he and Clari liked the hotel which I had recommended to them. Then, after a few days, he sent for Peter.

"This time," I said, "at least you'll be the bearer of good tidings for a change." For now we had received the report on the first tests of the paint from the aviation company that were highly satisfactory. "While you're away, I'll pass on the report to America, so you'd better tell that to Jupie, too. It'll give him something to think about," I added.

Left alone in the office, I wrote at length to my friend in New York. It was a relief to be alone, for Peter in those days seemed in a state of tension. I think he had hoped to be able to prove to Jupie that he was more than capable of running the business on his own and was secretly disappointed at the failure of our recent visit to the clients. Jupie's illness had given him his great chance to prove himself and the fact that the business showed no signs of improvement under his management had hurt his pride. Although he never mentioned this to me, I was certain that such was the case. He stayed late at the office and spent long hours over the accounts and made countless telephone calls to clients in search of business. It was high summer and inevitably business was slack, but, personally, I was too concerned with the progress of Leadol and the impending delivery of the samples to become a party to Peter's problems.

If the banking account was low, I could count on Jupie to replenish it and soon we would be in the position to start negotiations for the sale of the formula. In the meantime I was glad of the brief respite that Peter's departure to Wales gave me.

It was while he was away that I received a visit from a member of the Fraud Squad of Scotland Yard. Detective-Sergeant Spicer seemed to me in no way typical of his profession. He was young, healthy and, I remember, hatless. Somehow, I could not reconcile this last fact with my preconceived ideas of a detective that were based, I suppose, on my experience

as a film-goer. Detectives, I thought, not only always wore hats but seldom removed them and then only with reluctance in the presence of death. But Spicer was hatless and wore a tweed sports jacket and grey flannels so he looked like a promising scrum-half in a suburban rugby team rather than a sleuth. From a battered dispatch-case he produced one of our brochures. He had called, he told me, because the latter infringed the regulations of the Board of Trade in that the name and address of the firm did not appear on the back cover of the pamphlet as well as on the fly-leaf. I tendered my apologies and said that I trusted he would not immediately arrest me. With a polite smile he said he would take the matter up with the authorities and assured me that provided the error did not occur again, he imagined that I would hear no more about it.

He was a genial young man and inquired politely whether business was good and when I told him that things were quiet he expressed his sympathy.

"I will let you know what the Board of Trade has to say, sir," he told me and then departed leaving me wondering that fact and fiction were but so distantly related.

When I mentioned this visit to Peter, he seemed inclined to give it an importance beyond its value.

"What did he *really* want?" he asked suspiciously.

"I imagine precisely what he said," I told him.

But he insisted that Spicer was snooping, as he put it, and had called with an ulterior motive. "I don't like policemen sticking their noses into our affairs," he said angrily.

When Spicer telephoned to say that the authorities were prepared to overlook what had merely been a technical offence, Peter was somewhat reassured. "All the same," he demanded, "What right have these blokes to behave like the bloody Gestapo?"

"Anything less like a member of the Gestapo than Spicer I cannot imagine," I laughed. "I wish you'd seen him yourself then you would understand what I mean."

"Thank God I didn't," Peter said tersely. He seemed more nervous than ever and was full of complaints about his father.

"He's quite impossible," he grumbled. "Never stopped telling me how badly we were doing."

When I asked whether Jupie was pleased about the tests of the paint, Peter answered that he had appeared almost apathetic over the news.

"There's no doubt that the old boy's not well," he said with a note of genuine anxiety in his voice.

That evening I left the office depressed by the whole trend of events. I told myself that I disliked being a share dealer even more now than I had done nearly a year ago. I was just as much a fish out of water in the world of finance now as I had been when all those months ago I had joined the Association of Stock and Share Dealers, and the very language of the stock market was still as foreign to me. Whatever Jupie might say to the contrary, I knew that I would never make a good salesman if only because selling to me was synonymous with begging. However hard I might try, I knew that I would never be able to separate the one from the other in my mind.

Looking back on it now, I cannot help but wonder whether this despondency was not in part a premonition. That suddenly and far too late I had begun to sense that everything was going wrong. Yet I can hardly think that this was so. Apart from the fact that I am not intuitive, there was nothing, unless it was Jupie's illness, that had happened at that time to justify such a mood that I found so difficult to throw off. I remember telling myself that I was bored. Bored by going to the office every day. Bored by London in

summer and by the fact that I was becoming rapidly poorer and my meagre capital was nearly spent. I suddenly wanted nothing more than to see the closing down of the broking business once and for all. And for that reason I found myself pinning my hopes more and more on the future of Leadol. If only we could sell that, I told myself, my worries would be over. Then I would be able to pocket my share of the profits and retire. From both the European and American rights I could hope to draw comfortable royalties. I suppose I have always been over-optimistic and tend to count my chickens, but with the paint I sincerely believed that now that the tests had proved successful, my future was secure. I kept reminding myself of old Jupie's remark that this sort of thing happened but once in a man's lifetime. Now I felt I had every right to believe that it had happened to me.

I remember talking to Peter much along these lines one afternoon in the office and I was a little surprised when he agreed with me. He was, he said, sick of broking.

"I'm not like Jupie. He gets a kick out of it that I don't. To him it's an exciting game and the bigger it grows the more exciting it becomes. After a bit, he isn't even so much interested in the actual money he makes as in the size of the business and the number of people he can talk into buying shares. I'm not like that. At least, not any more and if and when we pull off a deal with Leadol I'm through with broking for keeps," he said with an intensity that astonished me.

"What will you do then?" I asked.

"If I make enough money, I shall first of all give myself a damned good time. I'll travel some more and maybe go back to the States, to New York. But whatever I do, I'm determined to be on my own," he said.

So, I thought, he still dreamt of his independence.

Well, perhaps through Leadol, Peter, too, would at last realise an ambition. But it struck me that if Peter felt as he did and now that Jupie was not well, my plan to close down the business could be put into effect more easily than I had dared to hope, and this thought went a long way towards curing my depression. Once the paint was ready, I determined I would raise the whole question with Jupie and having made that decision I felt considerably happier in my mind.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE WEATHER in late July became insufferably hot and the air was laden with the oppression of impending thunder-storms. As I walked from my flat to the office, the streets of London seemed given over to tourists. Americans wrapped in nylon, young Germans, burnt crimson by the sun, bending beneath the weight of rucksacks, and ambling crowds from the North Country peevishly querulous in their pursuit of pleasure.

From the windows of my office I could see the lunch-time crowds lying on the grass in the centre of the Square; the typists and shopgirls in their summer frocks and the youths in open-necked shirts, all elbows and Adam's-apples, munching their sandwiches. Old shabby men slept on the benches under the plane trees, and even the lean, prowling tom-cat that eternally stalked the pigeons now dozed in the shadows. London reeked with the fumes of petrol and the overwhelming smell of boiling bitumen, and the sound of the roadmenders' drills echoed through the land. One's thoughts fled to quiet beaches on distant shores and to cool gardens shaded by trees and a great discontentment possessed one's soul.

In the office, Peter sat in his shirt sleeves, sweating and crumpled and grumbling of the heat, too inclined to bully the little typist and to shout impatiently and without reason at the telephonist. Now that he was living alone and ate always in restaurants, richly and

too well, he had put on weight. I suspected, too, that he stayed up late at night carousing with his friends and going to parties that had their conception in those airless underground clubs of his, for his face was pallid and his eyes puffy and his spasms of twitching painful to witness.

I often came late to the office in those days for there was little for me to do. But one morning, however, I arrived before Peter. The mail was on my desk and I started to read it. There was one letter from a client asking us to send him a cheque for the amount of money standing to his credit on our books. I turned up his account and noted that the sum due to him was in the neighbourhood of nine hundred pounds.

When Peter arrived, I told him that when he talked to his father on the telephone he must ask him to send us a cheque.

"There's not enough in the bank to pay this fellow," I said, "so see that Jupie sends us some."

I did not return to the office until late that afternoon and, having lunched well, I remember that I was contented with the world. Peter was sitting at his desk and I noticed immediately that he looked ill. His jowls were grey and the colour had drained from his lips. The ashtray on his desk was heaped with the stubs of half-smoked cigarettes.

"Aren't you well?" I asked, wondering whether the heavy luncheon he always ate at the Hungarian restaurant in Soho had disagreed with him, for he looked as though he was going to be sick.

"I feel like hell," he said and he sounded as if he might choke.

"What's the matter?"

"Everything," he said. He turned the crumpled packet of American cigarettes upside-down and, shaking it, found it empty.

"Give me a cigarette for Christ's sake," he said.

I passed him my case, asking him if he had telephoned to his father.

"Yes, I phoned him," he said leadenly.

"Is he all right? He's not ill again, is he?" I questioned.

Peter shook his head. "No, he's not ill."

"Then what the hell's the matter?" I pressed.

"Jupie says he can't let us have that money."

"Balls!" I laughed.

He stared at me stupidly. "That's what he said. He said he can't let us have the money because he hasn't got it," he repeated.

"He's in one of his moods," I said. "Probably he's trying to frighten us into working harder!"

"That's not what he said," Peter insisted.¹ "He said he hadn't any money left. At least, not enough to meet this account. Anyway, he's coming to London. They're both coming back. I've got to find them rooms."

I sat down in an armchair and looked at Peter. His flabby face with its sagging jowls and little half-open mouth reminded me of a goldfish staring at me through its glass bowl.

"I'm certain that Jupie's just being difficult," I said almost relieved that at last the old man had made up his mind to return to London. "Quite obviously, he can't suddenly be short of a thousand."

"I wouldn't be too sure about it, Tony," Peter said.

"But, Peter, how could he be?" I reasoned.

"I don't know. I simply don't know. He never tells me anything about his finances. He never tells me anything except that he can't afford to give me money when I ask for it," he said bitterly.

"That," I said, "is another story. It doesn't follow that he's broke because he tells you that."

"Supposing he is," Peter said watching me closely.

"Could you raise any money? Enough to pay this lot, I mean?"

I said that I did not know, but might be able to sell a reversion on a life interest in my mother's estate.

"It wouldn't amount to much. Anyway, this nine hundred isn't all we owe. Peter, what about the others?"

"They haven't asked for theirs yet. For Christ's sake let's face one thing at a time!" he said savagely.

"Let's wait until Jupie gets here," I told him for by now I was firmly convinced that the whole ghastly situation was in some inexplicable way of Peter's contriving. I felt certain that he had quarrelled with Jupie over the telephone, shouting at him as I had heard him do so many times before, for divided from him by all those miles of telephone wires he lost his fear of his father and so loved to bluster.

It was inconceivable that Jupie suddenly could be ruined, for that was what it amounted to if Peter was telling the truth. But I knew just how hysterical Peter could be; sometimes to the point of becoming unbalanced, and lately he had been living under a nervous strain. Amongst other things, I believe that he missed Willie. Not so much Willie in person, but the someone with whom he had lived. In his curious way he craved affection, and if not affection, companionship, even though it involved him in quarrels and emotional storms. I believe that he relished such jealous scenes and acrimonious recriminations and the passionate reconciliations that followed them. Now that all this was lacking from his life, he had become neurotic. An unstable nail-biter seeking escape from his loneliness in promiscuous rough-and-tumbles with the youths he picked up in his clubs or in the purlicus of Hyde Park, near his flat off Marble Arch. Secretly he despised himself for such

conduct, begrudging the money these squalid adventures cost him, and found but little relief from them so that he lived in a state of frustration and self-condemnation that played the devil with his temper. So it is scarcely to be wondered that I did not now take him seriously. Yet his complete collapse in the face of this crisis infuriated me so that I found myself longing to get up from my armchair and slap him hard across the face. Instead, I asked him when Jupie would be arriving from Wales and where he would be staying. To both these questions Peter answered that he did not know.

"When they arrive, they'll come to my place. In the meantime I've got to find them somewhere to stay. Christ knows where," he said helplessly.

"At this time of year, they'll get into the Ritz quite easily," I said and the incongruity of my remark made me laugh. But Peter was in no condition to be amused. And so I left him, slumped in his chair, with instructions to telephone to me as soon as Jupie arrived.

The sun had now sunk low and the air had begun to grow cooler, so I strolled down Bond Street, deserted by shoppers, across Piccadilly to the Ritz Bar, for more than anything else at that moment I needed a drink. The bar was empty and, ordering a large whisky and soda, I sat down at a table in a corner. I have always had an affection for the downstairs bar at the Ritz. It is not a particularly cheerful bar. Its decor is neither remarkable for its charm nor its artistic taste. Excepting during the war when it became slightly disreputable and overcrowded, it is not even very popular or fashionable. Nevertheless, for me it has a nostalgic attraction. I have been drunker in it than in any other bar and, since I used it as a shelter during air raids, infinitely more frightened. It is the only bar that I know of on whose floor a king slept for nights on end; a fact that gives it a certain cachet,

even if the king had lost his crown. But be that as it may, my reasons for liking the Ritz Bar are purely personal and because by some strange chance it has always been associated with moments in my life, if not of high emotion, at least of serious consequence. I once became engaged there. Leaning against its bar, I entered later upon a love affair that lasted in a storm of happiness for seven years. One evening, I cashed there a cheque. The last I was to write for many years. But I am running ahead of my story . . .

By the time I left it that evening, I was rather drunk and night had fallen. As I received no message from Peter about Jupie's arrival, I imagined he must have tried to telephone me without success at my flat and finally given up trying. But I no longer cared whether Jupie had arrived or not, for I had convinced myself with the aid of whisky that there was nothing to worry about. Even if Peter's story were true, and I doubted it more than ever, to-morrow or the next day the paint would be ready and it would be possible to negotiate a sale and so save the situation. In my present state I was not at all sure exactly how this was to be done or how long it would take. But I was positive that it could be done and that the person to do it was Jupie. Walking across Berkeley Square. I knew that whatever happened I could rely upon the old man. Peter was an ass. A fat, emotional, flabby ass, puffed up with his own conceit, and I regretted now not having slapped his face. But Jupie I could depend upon. Big, solid, courageous old Jupie would never collapse in a crisis as Peter had done. He had brains and he had guts as well.

Thank God for Jupie, I thought as I went to bed. Good old boy!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE STRATOCRUISER flew at eighteen thousand feet over the Atlantic. It seemed suspended in space above endless miles of cottonwool. Now and again, it dropped a little and shook its tail so that I felt frightened, remembering a film I had recently seen, called *No Highway*, which was all about the tails falling off air liners. A film in which Marlene Dietrich had been a traveller in the plane. I looked down the rows of sleeping passengers, dishevelled, shapeless bundles, wrapped in their blue blankets, and regretted that none of them remotely resembled that exquisite star.

I had boarded the plane at London Airport rather drunk and must have slept for a considerable time. How long I could not tell for my watch had stopped. But now I was awake, my head ached furiously and I realised that I was suffering from a brutal hang-over. I longed desperately for a drink but felt certain that the little bar under the plane's belly was shut, and I was far too nervous to ring for the hostess who was probably dozing in the shadowy recesses of the fuselage. So I lay back in my seat, fumbling for a cigarette and trying not to wake the man sleeping next to me. In the dim blue light his face took on a curious corpse-like appearance and I noticed that his beard was already sprouting for he was a darkly hirsute creature who smelt strongly of scent.

The click of my lighter half-wakened him and he stirred and mumbled complainingly. My head swam

as I inhaled the first breath of the cigarette deeply, and then it cleared so that I became fully conscious for the first time since I had passed out many hours before. I decided with a twinge of shame that that was precisely what I had done. Not fallen asleep, but passed out. I was certain that I had been in a drunken torpor for a long time because now I was frigidly sober and my brain starkly clear. Now battalions of thoughts rushed in to take possession of my mind and I felt my pulses pounding under the shock of their assault.

I was on my way to America; to New York. In the blue overnight bag on the rack just above my head were two bottles containing samples of Leadol that I was bearing to my friend, the head of the chemical corporation. I was doing something that I had always sworn I would never do—flying the Atlantic Ocean. Only in an emergency could I ever have persuaded myself to break that vow, for I had a real dread of flying over oceans. But if the present situation was not an emergency, then I had never been faced with one, I thought, with a sickening feeling at the pit of my stomach.

“There is boot von thing to do, Toni,” Jupie had said. “You must fly to New York und see these people und see vot money you can get from them quickly.”

He had said that three days ago. It had been his final decision made ten days after his return from Wales. Ten days that then seemed to me, as I lay back in my seat in the Stratocruiser, of hideous delirium out of which I had just regained consciousness.

At no time in my life had I undergone such a mental strain. Not even during the worst moments of the war had I struggled so hard with my courage.

I had gone to see Jupie at his hotel. Not the Ritz, as I had jokingly suggested, but the Mount Royal, in Oxford Street, which Peter had said was the only place that had been able to provide accommodation at

such short notice. As I came into the room, Peter was staring listlessly out of the window, biting his lip and white around the gills. Through the open door leading to the bedroom, I could see Clari moving about with a sort of mechanical lifelessness, unpacking suitcases. I remember being surprised that she did not come to greet me. But it was not until I looked at Jupie that I realised that everything he had said to Peter over the telephone was true. I had arrived still firmly convinced that Peter's story was rubbish. Now, as I looked at Jupie, I knew that it was nothing of the kind. The old man's face was ashen and his eyes were red-rimmed with lack of sleep. He tried with difficulty to get out of the armchair in which he sat and then gave up trying, sinking back into it. He made a rather pathetic attempt to smile at me and muttered something so low that I was unable to catch what he said. Then he began to explain things to me. He talked of his holdings in South Africa and his oil shares in Canada, but under stress he was scarcely coherent and I could not understand what he was talking about. Even had he been the essence of clarity at that moment, I do not think I could have understood him any better, for I was stunned by the awful significance of what he was trying to tell me. I could only think of the money that was owing, wondering frenziedly how and where I could find that money, yet knowing with an increasing sense of panic that it would never be found. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that I became temporarily a little insane that morning. I know that I lost my head, which is much the same thing. I know this because I remember telling Jupie that I would try to raise all the money we owed—some five thousand pounds—and in a dotty sort of way I believed what I was saying. I even set out to do so. I went to my lawyer and told him what had happened and pleaded with him to find what money he could by any possible

means. But even as I talked to him, I knew perfectly well that there was nothing that he could do. Yet I kept on talking. I could hear myself talking and the words I spoke sounded utter nonsense. But I did not care. I did not care when he told me that my folly was criminal and upbraided me for ever becoming mixed up with such people as the Gerts. Such re-criminations no longer mattered. They were merely futile. My lawyer's shocked voice made me angry and, quite unjustly, I dubbed him an inefficient old fool for being unable to offer any solution to the problem.

Because I dreaded admitting my failure to Jupie, I walked into a pub in the Strand and got drunk on whisky and I stayed drunk for the rest of the day, hoping that Jupie would think that I was still fighting to save the sinking ship.

The next morning he came to the office looking better and more like his old self. If he was not exactly a lion refreshed, he was at least master of himself again. Time, he declared was our greatest enemy and yet, on the other hand, we must play for time. Because that was so vitally important, Jupie told me that I must journey to the Midlands to call upon the client who had asked for his money and persuade him to wait for payment.

"Speak frankly mit him," Jupie had said. "Tell him that business is not goot und ask him that he should wait until the next settlement day for payment."

I had asked what use such a brief respite could possibly be to us and Jupie had answered that Peter had already left to collect a dozen sample bottles of the paint. "This afternoon I haf arranged a meeting for us mit the directors of a big paint manufacturing company, und I think perhaps ve vill do some business," Jupie told me.

But although we sat round the polished boardroom table in conference, we did no business. The directors

of the company wished to make certain tests of their own which, they said, would take time. Time. That word haunted me throughout those ghastly days. Try how I would, there was no escaping from it.

After journeying to the Midlands, I stood talking to the client in the waiting-room of his house. He was a dentist and we talked between patients. I no longer remembered what I said to him. I only knew that I had asked him for time to pay. A week, or it may have been ten days. I supposed that I must have sounded convincing for he had agreed to wait. He had granted me time, and I returned to London and told Jupie.

But now as the plane droned on its way to New York and I could see through the porthole the rose red dawn breaking and below—far below—the blue-black outline of the Newfoundland coast, those last days and all that I had crowded into them had become confused in my mind. I could no longer recall in any sort of chronological order what had happened. A few salient points stood out in my mind, such as the morning when another client had written asking for his money. Peter, with a despairing cry, had buried his face in his hands and said: "That's the end! Now we're sunk!"

It may have been that cry of Peter's that rallied old Jupie to make one more desperate effort to find a way out and to say that I must go to America—to New York—with the samples of the paint.

"I vill remain here und I vill play for time mit the clients. That is all vot is left to do. Mit my lawyers I can handle this situation. Besides, this business is in your name, Toni, und it is better that at such a time you should be away from London," he explained. "You give to me a Power of Attorney that I can act for you in the last resource. Boot mit you in New York, I shall say that nothing can be done until you return.

Boot go you immediately to New York by the next plane."

"But, Jupie, what *can* you do?" I had asked for there seemed nothing left that anyone could do.

"I promise you that I vill think of something," Jupie had said. "There is always something vot can be done und I vill find it." And for the first time for days he had laughed. I think that the very hopelessness of our predicament was a challenge to him and he gained a new strength from it.

"I do not say not to vorry, Toni. That vood be foolishness," he told me. "Boot I say not to be despairing for I promise again I vill not let you down."

It had been too late to argue. Too late to say more than that in leaving him alone now I felt that I was running away and behaving like a coward, for once again there was no time.

I had borrowed the money for my plane ticket from a friend. I had booked my passage and packed a suitcase. On the afternoon of my departure I had tea with Jupie and Clari at the Ritz Hotel. I remembered now how Clari had thrown her arms round my neck and kissed me.

"Don't vorry too much, Toni. You must trust to Jupie," she had said, so that I realised that she, too, knew of the crisis in all our lives. The latter was not a secret that Jupie had guarded from her.

Then I had gone down into the bar and drunk a quantity of whisky with an old friend, for I greatly dreaded the flight ahead of me.

Unexpectedly, at the air terminus Peter had appeared asking urgently that I should sign several blank sheets of notepaper.

Befuddled, I had asked: "What the hell for?"

"We may need to write letters in your name," he had told me.

The bus was waiting. There had been no time for further questions so I had signed.

In the bar at the airport as we waited for the plane, I had turned to my friend and said: "Remember the name Detective-Sergeant Spicer, of the Fraud Squad at Scotland Yard. Write it down."

"For Heaven's sake, why?" he laughed.

"Just in case anything goes wrong and I should cable you to get into touch with him," I had said mysteriously.

My friend laughed again. "You're very tight," he said and I agreed with him.

"Nevertheless," I said with difficulty, "remember the name."

It was scarcely possible that all that had happened but a few hours ago, for it seemed that I had lived or slept through an eternity of time since I had stumbled on to the plane in England, struggling to appear sober and unafraid before the other passengers, and after a drink or two in the little bar, had finally passed out. I was to learn later that while I was unconscious we had actually landed in Iceland to re-fuel.

Those dreadful days had now taken on a strange unreality so that they appeared to me as a nightmare from which I had at last awakened. A wild, savage nightmare that left me limp and utterly exhausted, yet oddly relaxed now that it was all over.

The long cabin was filled with the pale sunlight of a new day, and the air hostess was rattling breakfast trays in her little pantry so that my whole being was possessed with a longing for coffee. I got up, not caring any longer whether I disturbed the man sleeping next to me, and went to the lavatory to clean my teeth and wash away the fumes of the whiskies from the night before. I was horrified to find that my precious sample bottles of paint had leaked in the overnight bag.

"New York in another two hours," the air hostess told me as she brought my breakfast. "I'm glad you slept so well."

I looked at her to see if she was mocking me, but decided that she was too well-trained a servant of the company to have been so flippant. She looked neat and freshly laundered and as mechanically efficient as the plane in which we flew.

The eastern seaboard of the States was held in the sticky embrace of a heatwave and although it was yet early in the morning when we landed at Idlewild, I was soon bathed in sweat and wretchedly uncomfortable in my flannel suit. In the Customs building, my hang-over threatened to overtake me again and I felt ill-fitted to cope with officialdom and conscious that I reeked pungently of the spilt paint in my bag. But I was treated with that rough kindness that so many Englishmen in their insularity mistake for bad manners.

Then George, who had driven out to meet me, came to my aid. He was one of those long-legged, corn-coloured Americans who even in middle-age retain a shy adolescence. Although he was the head of a great business organisation, and probably a millionaire, he looked still much as he had done when I first knew him as a youth at Harvard University. I had never grown used to the fact that he bore heavy responsibilities, employing hordes of workers in the manufacture of his products for the world's markets, for I knew him best as a keen yachtsman, who sailed his own sturdy schooner in ocean races, an intrepid skier and an enthusiastic farmer who raised Jersey cattle on his farm in Vermont. It was on the latter that I had stayed when I had last visited the States, and now as we drove over the flats of New Jersey through the early morning heat haze, George told me to my delight that we would be flying up to Vermont that afternoon.

"We must get out of this heat for the weekend," he said. "But before anything else, I guess you want to take a bath and put on something cooler. The thermometer will be up in the nineties by noon. So I'll drop you off at the apartment on my way to the office and we can meet for lunch when you've rested up a while."

His apartment occupied the second and third floors of an old house in the East Thirties and from the balconied windows of its sitting-room one looked out on to gardens and trees so that one felt one was in a quiet side-street in Kensington rather than the centre of Manhattan. The apartment was the essence of unobtrusive comfort, with its deep armchairs, its many bookshelves and George's collection of modern paintings which included several delightfully gay Dufy's that held captive all the sunlight and colour of the Mediterranean. There were cold drinks to hand and an abundance of my favourite brand of American cigarettes.

In the bathroom with its regiments of bottles and voluminous towels that matched the rose-coloured tiles, I shed my troubles as easily as I did my travel-stained shirt and underclothes and I marvelled how rapidly one's immediate financial problems dissipated in this atmosphere of studied yet unostentatious luxury.

As I lay in the bath, I felt sure that the possession of wealth was the panacea for all one's worries and that those who argued to the contrary bore upon their souls the indelible stains of the Seven Deadly Sins.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THAT AFTERNOON before leaving New York for Vermont, I cabled Jupie to tell him that the sample bottles of the paint had leaked and asked that he should send me others immediately by air freight. For, while I had brought with me the formula, George was anxious to test the paint in his laboratory. He was already intensely interested in Leadol, realising its potential value, but as he pointed out the samples that I had brought with me were little better than useless since all that remained in the bottles was the heavy lead deposit, so that the mixture had lost its suspension.

Locking the formula in the safe in his office, he said, provided further samples were sent at once, the delay was unimportant as there was nothing that could be done at his laboratory until after the weekend.

"So we might just as well get out of this ghastly heat," he added, and since the very pavements of New York seemed to burn one's feet, I agreed with him.

I have always had an aversion to staying in other people's houses, because, I suppose, I am too innately selfish to conform to a pattern of life other than of my own making. For that reason, except for the briefest periods, I have no doubt but that I fall sadly short of being the ideal guest. Not that I am an exacting guest, expecting to be entertained and constantly amused. The contrary is the case. Nevertheless, the moment I am a guest, I am the victim of my social conscience and my sense of duty to my host becomes

an insupportable burden to me. But at the farm in Vermont I could stay almost indefinitely. I have a deep affection for that warmly hospitable house of rose red brick, standing on a spur of the foothills to the White Mountains against a background of noble trees, from whose terrace no other building can be seen, but only a splendid panorama of woodlands and rolling pastures. I cherish delightful memories of its spacious rooms, their honey-coloured wood floors waxed and polished, that smell faintly of the burnt logs in their basket grates, and of the bedroom in which I slept with its closely-packed bookshelves and finely-arched window, looking out across the valley to the distant mountains. It is a house littered with the latest books, and, for those who wish to play it, there is one of those miraculously ingenious gramophones that once loaded with records scorns all further human interference. While should one feel disposed to visit friends in the neighbourhood, there is always a car in the garage that nobody else wants to use. And there are dogs that patter in and out, amiable, smiling and independent, but never ingratiating. Once when I stayed there, there was a turkey, called Winston, that joined us always for tea and appeared to thrive on a diet of cigarette ends.

Then, too, George is the perfect host, who makes no demands upon one's sociability. He allows his guests to do exactly as they please, insisting only that they appear when the deep-toned bell in the stable yard announces that a meal is waiting. He is, in fact, a restlessly energetic person, his head always filled with plans for improvements to the house and grounds. He possesses the faith and the money, if not to move mountains, at least to eliminate here and there a hill-side, replacing it by a lake fed by a waterfall. So one returns to the farm in a state of excited anticipation, never knowing what changes have taken place since

one's last visit. ° That summer, I remember, I arrived to find that the kitchen garden on which I had lavished so much care and labour a year before had disappeared. Where I had bent double weeding the strawberry beds a deep ravine yawned, through which my host told me with pride a mountain stream would shortly flow.

We lingered on at Vermont, stretching that weekend until it extended over five days, and then flew back to New York, during the last days of August. In the evening, when George came home from his office, he told me that the cable I had sent to Jupie had been returned as unclaimed.

"I wonder what's happened?" he said casually. I said that I did not know.

He handed me the cable. "There you are. Have a look at it yourself."

I took the slip of paper and stared at it, trying to fathom the significance of those words, "returned unclaimed". I had sent the cable to Jupie's hotel because I had been uncertain if he would be at the office during the weekend. It was possible, I thought, that he might have moved from the Mount Royal as he had said that he did not like it.

I asked George if I might telephone to London.

"Go ahead, the phone's all yours," he said, "I guess I'll take a shower while you're trying to get through."

But I did not get through. After endless and maddening delays, the operator in London told me that she could get no reply from my office and that the line appeared to be out of service. I had the call transferred to Jupie's hotel and was informed that Doctor Gert had gone away. "He gave us no forwarding address," said the girl at the reception office. I thanked her and hung up the receiver, cursing the ease with which one could pick up a telephone and speak half across the world to so little purpose. Then I sat down and wrote a long

cable to my friend, Philip, who had seen me off from the London Airport, asking him to go to the office to find out what had happened and to let me know. For all that I knew, Jupie might have decided to close the office until my return. To speculate as to what was happening all those miles away was waste of time. It was impossible even to guess at what Jupie had planned. I was too far removed from all the turmoil that I had left behind even to imagine what the old man could be doing. Yet to have lost contact with him at this moment irritated me so that I waited impatiently for Philip's reply.

Forty-eight hours later, I received it.

"Gerts gone. Office closed. Spicer advises your immediate return."

Even now, four years later, I find it difficult to write of my feelings as I read that cable. It is sufficient to say that I was alone in the apartment and therefore there was no real reason why I should have exercised any control, other than for my own self-respect. But there are moments in all our lives when self-respect ceases to have any importance. Whatever I did, I thank God there was no one to see me do it.

After a while I calmed down and began quite dispassionately to review my situation. The Gerts had gone; Jupie, Clari and Peter. Where they had gone, I neither knew nor cared, at least not then. That they had gone, left no doubts in my mind that Jupie had broken his promise to me. So, quite obviously, I was not only ruined, but I owed a great deal of money that I could not possibly repay. Money belonging to other people that had been entrusted to me.

I poured myself out a large whisky and soda, swallowing it down. I was possessed by a strange feeling of excitement for which I could find no explanation. I felt suddenly utterly alone and yet not in the least afraid. That I must return immediately to

London became a matter of extreme urgency to me. I imagined, rather vaguely, that I would be arrested as soon as I arrived, but, oddly enough, such a prospect left me unconcerned. Nothing was important beyond the fact that I should return at once; if possible, that very day and by the next plane.

I telephoned George and explained the situation briefly to him, begging him to use his influence to get me an air passage.

"I must get back," I told him.

"Hadn't you better think about it for twenty-four hours?" he suggested.

"Thinking won't help," I told him. "I must get back. Don't ask me why or what for. But I must get back to find out what's happened."

George managed to get me a seat on the plane leaving that same afternoon, and before I left we had luncheon together. While we ate, I told him about the Gerts.

"It looks as if you've been pretty trusting, Tony," he said with a wry smile.

"That's the nature of the beast!" I answered.

"You were never a business man, that's certain," he said.

"I hate not trusting people," I told him.

"And what will you do now?" he asked.

"Face the music—however it may be composed. But, I confess, I'm not looking forward to it."

On the way to the airport, we discussed the future of Leadol. "It may yet save the situation for you," George encouraged.

"Pray God that it will. But only He knows what's owing to the various chemists who made up the samples," I said. "I dread to think of the chaos of unpaid bills that's waiting for me."

"Let me know what happens," George said. "If there's anything that I can do——."

"I doubt if there's anything anyone can do, but thank you," I said.

I was too occupied with my thoughts on the flight home even to have been conscious of my old dread of flying the Atlantic. I sat huddled in my seat thinking about what had happened to me and wondering why it had happened. My thoughts were chiefly concerned with Jupie, for I was deeply hurt that he had thus deserted me and still searched for some possible explanation for why he had done so. I could not believe that he had just walked out on me, brutally and without thought as to what would happen to me. Yet more than a week had elapsed since I had arrived in New York and I had been without news of him. And now he was gone. When had he left London? My cable to him at the Mount Royal Hotel, sent on the morning of my arrival in New York, should have reached him in a few hours. Yet it had been returned as unclaimed. Could Jupie, then, have left the very day after my departure? As I asked myself that question, I felt sick with apprehension, for if the answer to it was yes, then it was certain that Jupie had planned to desert me even before he had suggested that I should go to the States.

I recalled vividly the last time I had seen him that afternoon at tea with Clari at the Ritz. He had put his arm round my shoulders, giving me a bearlike hug, telling me to leave everything to him. Had he then, I wondered, made his arrangements to flee the country? Were the tickets already in his pocket? The tickets for himself and Clari and Peter? I remembered that parting kiss of Clari's. Had there been a hint of finality about it? I could not remember her ever having been so demonstrative before. Had she known that she was really saying good-bye to me and that she would never see me again? I shuddered at the thought of such hideous hypocrisy and decided that I

was allowing my sense of drama to get the better of reason.

Then I went to the bar and ordered a drink and took the two sleeping tablets that George had given me, for I felt that it was imperative that I should get some rest. But they failed to induce sleep and I sat staring out of the porthole at the stars and the moonlit banks of clouds below that looked like glorious snowfields—a veritable skiers' paradise. I watched the cowlings of the engine close beside me glowing red in the darkness and wondered lazily why the wing did not catch fire and a little of my fear of flying returned to me.

Had Jupie, Clari and Peter fled by plane? If they had, what had they done with those many cabin trunks without which they never seemed to journey anywhere? They could not possibly have taken those trunks by plane. Perhaps, they had gone by sea? By sea to where, I speculated? Then the thought struck me that Jupie had probably gone to Venezuela to join Fritz. I had no reason for imagining why he should have done anything of the kind. He might equally well have gone to Germany or Switzerland. I had no means of knowing. Probably Detective-Sergeant Spicer knew all the answers and it would not have surprised me if Spicer was not at London Airport to meet me. With that happy thought, the pills that George had given me must have at last taken affect, for I fell asleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT SPICER shook hands and said that he was pleased to see me. We met not at the airport but in a small office on the ground floor of Scotland Yard, whither I had gone by appointment the morning after my return from New York, during the last days of August, 1951.

"Before we go any further, sir, I may as well tell you, speaking off the record, mind you, that you've got yourself mixed up with some of the biggest share-pushers in Europe. They're wanted by the police in South Africa, Italy and Canada—and we wouldn't mind seeing them here," he added with a businesslike smile.

I marked a certain change in his manner since we had last met. It was more professional. It was the manner of the dentist towards a nervous client or the surgeon to the numbed patient on the operating table. I imagined that it could have been that of the hangman to his victim, because it was a trifle apologetic.

"Would you mind being a little more explicit?" I asked.

Spicer was watching me closely.

"You're surprised?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"I'm more than surprised. I can hardly believe you," I told him. "They never did any share-pushing over here. The shares they bought—or should have bought according to the contract notes they sent to

clients—were*perfectly genuine stuff quoted every day in the papers."

Spicer allowed himself to laugh. "They were genuine, but they were never bought or delivered. All your clients ever got were those contract notes."

I thought of all those notes that had gone out bearing my signature—and only my signature.

"You never fulfilled those contracts. Those transactions, in fact, only took place on paper, or in theory, as you might say."

"At least we never sold any dud shares," I argued.

"Are you quite sure of that?" the young man asked pointedly, and before I could answer, he said: "What about those shares in the Mason Printing Company that you offered to your clients when you and young Gert called on them a couple of months or so ago?"

I was taken aback by his question. "My God, I hadn't thought of that!" I exclaimed.

Spicer smiled. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, they wouldn't have been worth the paper they were printed on. I think you'd have found that Doctor Gert's football pool scheme would have failed for some reason or other."

"Well," I said, "we never managed to persuade anyone to buy those shares."

"But you tried to. Both you and young Gert tried to," he repeated. And as he did so, I realised that when the time had come to switch our unfortunate clients from those undelivered but genuine shares to the dud stock, Jupie had insisted that I should accompany Peter, thus making quite certain that I was criminally involved in his fraud.

"We never sold any," I said again, knowing that I was defending myself.

"Which was lucky for you! But if the Doctor had been given time, he'd have found some way of talking your clients into transferring their holdings in Blyvoors

and Canadian Lumber to stock that would have turned out worthless. That was always his practise on other occasions," he added knowingly.

"You seem pretty *au fait* with his methods," I remarked.

"Well, speaking off the record," Spicer began, for that seemed a favourite phrase of his, "the Gerts are international crooks, on a large scale. We know all about them," he added, patting the large file of papers which he carried.

"Did you know all about them that day you called on me?" I questioned.

The young man smiled.

"We did, I'm afraid," he answered.

I felt angry and probably without reason for he had no doubt acted in accordance with his instructions. He must, however, have guessed my trend of thought, for he said: "That little matter of the booklet was simply an excuse for calling on you."

"An excuse or a trick?" I asked sharply.

"It was all in the course of my duty, sir," Spicer explained politely.

"I do think that you might have warned me," I rebuked. "Shall we say it would have been the sporting thing to do?"

Spicer ignored the thrust.

"That would have been most irregular, sir," he said.

"Not in accordance with the rules. I quite understand," I said venomously. "But tell me, where have the Gerts gone?"

"You don't know?" he countered.

I shook my head.

"We understand to South America."

"When, roughly, did they leave?"

"Just over a week ago. We received information through one of your clients that he had made several attempts to get in touch with your office without

success. His suspicions were aroused and he communicated with the police. We called at your offices and found them empty—quite empty,” Spicer repeated, eyeing me.

“You mean there was no one there?”

“I mean more than that, sir,” he said. “There was nothing there; not even any furniture. The company’s books were not found. You wouldn’t have any knowledge as to what became of them?” he asked.

“I’m afraid not.”

“You didn’t, for instance, see them destroyed before you—er—flew to New York?” I suspected that only out of consideration for me had he refrained from using the word fled.

“I must disappoint you, Spicer, but I did not.”

I had no means of telling whether he believed me for, through training I imagined, he had acquired a mask of inscrutability. In his opinion I was just another case—a share-pushing crook who, having fled the country, had now returned hoping to save his own hide by shifting the onus of the fraud on to his missing confederates.

I felt that Spicer’s next remark established his attitude towards me.

“Well, shall we get everything down on paper?” he suggested, smoothing the sheets of foolscap on the table. “I dare say you want to get it all off your chest.” One felt that experience had taught him how insufferably heavy the cross of guilt can become.

“First, your name, age and address.”

His manner was now entirely professional so that he seemed to shed his comfortable civilian clothes and don the familiar blue uniform of the lesser orders of his calling. The ball-point pen poised over the virgin white sheets of paper.

“We shan’t get through all this to-day—not even to-morrow. It’ll take us a day or two. So we might

as well get started," he smiled. Taking statements must be among the more monotonous duties of a policeman.

I spent several days in Spicer's company dictating page after page of the long report that I made to the police and answering questions concerning intricate facts and figures about the business. As I told my story, I became daily more conscious of how improbable it must sound to the man who wrote it all down in his round, flowing handwriting. Although he gave no hint of it, I was convinced that he did not believe the greater part of what I told him. It must have appeared to him altogether too artless and ingenuous to be credible. No one, his moments of polite astonishment suggested, could possibly be so utterly gullible, and now that I was in possession of the truth about the Gerts, I confess that I was inclined to agree with him.

Yet, I asked myself, how could I have known? How could I or any of those wretched people in Johannesburg, Florence and Toronto have known that Jupie was an arch-swindler? Had he not convinced those business men in the City—those members of the Committee of the Association of Stock and Share Dealers—of his respectability? It was so absurdly easy to be wise after the event. Such wisdom gave people a God-like sense of their own superiority that was entirely divorced from reality and out of all proportion to their true powers of perception. Because of it, they were incapable of understanding—or believing, for that matter—that a man of my age and quality could have been thus duped.

Over and over again, when the young detective raised his eyebrows and commented: "And you naturally believed Doctor Gert?" I knew that he did not believe me when I answered in the affirmative. And, frankly, I did not blame him. Not that it mattered

a row of pins one way or the other what he believed. In the final event, I imagined that I would have to convince a Judge and jury.

But as I made my statement, the fact gradually dawned upon me that no one had the right to be the fool that I had been and that such folly in the eyes of the world—and for all I knew, the law—was criminal. No one, unless they had known Jupie as intimately as I had done, could possibly consider my behaviour in any other light; least of all, Spicer.

He had no means of telling that while I was talking to him I was even then piecing together the whole amazing story of my relationship with the Gerts in its true pattern. Only now was I able to appreciate how diabolically cunning in its conception had been their plan to use me as their dupe. I wondered at what precise moment Jupie and Peter had decided that I was to be their victim? Could it have been in Florence? As connoisseurs of the weaknesses and follies of men, they must even then have realised my possible value to them. Yet, I thought, it was probably later that they made up their minds about me. That time in London after chance had brought us together again at Leoni's when I had told old Jupie the whole sad story of the disintegration of my hopes as an heir. Then must have been the moment when, knowing that I was no longer one of "the last of the rentiers", Jupie had decided to make use of me. I saw now with an awful clarity that all that fatherly advice against living in the South of France, the hints that I should make use of those influential friends of mine, and even the jocular suggestion that I should join him in Canada, were no more than a part of that subtly-baited trap.

Now as I talked to Spicer, and heard the answers to the occasional questions I put to him, the jigsaw puzzle of my life during the past three years took shape

for the first time. I learnt that colleagues of Spicer's had actually called on Jupie at his flat in Carrington House, and I knew that their visit had coincided with the old man's alleged heart attack and his decision to take that holiday in Eire. When Spicer told me that it was on the instigation of Scotland Yard that Jupie had been chivvied out of Eire, it was easy to understand the phase of restlessness on which Peter had remarked at the time. I knew now that Jupie had carefully planned his escape to South America as methodically as he had planned every other move in his vile exploitation of myself. In order to put it into effect it was essential that he should first get rid of me to America, after having persuaded me to give him that Power of Attorney making it possible for him to sell up every stick of furniture and all the machinery in the offices in Hanover Square. It was clear to me, too, that only by pleading poverty could the old man put an end to the business without having to pay its debts, for I no longer had any doubt that he could have paid all that was owing.

How, I asked myself with growing apprehension, could I have been such a blind fool? How could I never have suspected that when Jupie generously told me to draw that hundred pounds from the business instead of giving me his own cheque, he was involving me in his loathsome crimes?

"You actually drew the money from the bank yourself?" Spicer asked me, as I told him of the incident.

"Yes," I answered.

"Of course there is no evidence, other than your own word, to prove that the Doctor told you to do this," he remarked.

There was, as he said, no evidence to prove that or a great many other points in my statement. And without such evidence, it seemed less and less likely that anyone would believe my story.

But if the greater part of the intricate puzzle fell into place, there were pieces of it that were missing altogether that even Spicer could not help me to find.

If Jupie was on the run from justice that time in London after leaving Florence, it seemed to me extraordinary that he had been able to start operations in Canada and, later, in London without interference by the authorities. There had been nothing secretive about his appearances in those countries. They had been ostentatious in their display. The Gert caravan did not move with stealth and by night. It travelled in a positive blaze of grandeur, pausing luxuriously on the way for rest and recreation.

The whole story of these people seemed cloaked in mystery. Even now as I write what I know of it, there are parts of it that still remain as mysterious to me as they did during those long days I spent at Scotland Yard.

Then, I confess that I had the impression that the police were not very active in their pursuit of the Gerts. Of course, I did not know then how cautious is the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in taking action at the public's expense. I did not in my ignorance realise that since I had returned from New York of my own volition and made a full statement to the police, providing them with all the information in my possession, there was no need for the authorities to take proceedings against anyone else. I was, so to speak, the bird in hand.

Rather naively, and to Spicer's embarrassment, I asked when I might expect to be arrested.

"One cannot even say that you will be," he explained. "There is a great deal of evidence still to be taken and quite a number of witnesses to be interviewed. When all that has been done, we shall then submit the whole case to the D.P.P. It is

for his department to decide what action will be taken."

"And in the meantime?" I asked.

"You're free to do what you like," he answered.

"Quite free?"

"It would perhaps save trouble if you kept in touch with me. Just so that I know where to find you in case anything crops up," he explained in his lightest manner.

"I see," I said.

"Have you any plans?" he asked and managed to make the question sound casually social.

"None," I said, "but I'll keep in touch."

Spicer and I kept in touch for the next nine months. Whenever I moved, which was frequently in those days for I was always short of money and for ever looking for somewhere cheaper to live, I let him know my address. Once, when I was invited to Paris, I telephoned to ask him if I might go and he gave his permission. But during all that time I did not see him again, for he was a busy man. Occasionally, I read his name in the paper in connection with the extradition of someone guilty of fraud who had fled the country, so that I pictured young Spicer boarding a plane in Madrid or Marseilles with his victim and making pleasant conversation on the journey and chatting amiably off the record.

Those nine months were infinitely depressing and during them I lived continually under the strain of knowing that at any moment I might be arrested. I lived precariously, unable to take any sort of a job, on a small part of the proceeds of the sale of my life interest in my mother's estate. The rest of the money I cherished against the day when I might have to engage lawyers and brief a barrister to defend me. I shared a small furnished flat off Notting Hill with a devoted friend. But, after a while, every ring of the telephone bell made my pulses quicken, and I borrowed

a cottage on the edge of the New Forest; a cottage that had no telephone. To occupy my mind, I settled down to write a play; a light comedy that held no kind of mirror to my life at that time. I lived through the days and months as best I could, but it would be pointless to deny that my nights were often tortured by sleeplessness and futile speculation concerning my future. Sometimes, I went impatiently to the nearest telephone box and called Spicer, asking him for news. At others, I longed to call him but lacked the courage to do so and waited helplessly for the telegram that I expected he would send me. I do not think that I ever became reconciled to waiting, although, of course, there were times when I managed to forget the possibility of my arrest. I know that during those months I became something of a recluse, obsessed with the fear of involving any of my friends in the scandal that hung over me, so that I refused invitations not only to stay with friends, but even to meet them. I know, too, that I drank a good deal. At times, more than I could afford. When I was not writing, I read avidly simply to keep myself from brooding. Oddly enough, I hardly ever at that stage thought about the Gerts. Certainly, I never talked about them because I had found out that to do so involved me in acrimonious discussions as to why I had ever become mixed up with such people.

Then one day, in the middle of April, 1952, I received a telegram from Spicer asking me to telephone him. I went to the village call-box and asked for Whitehall 1212.

"What news?" I asked. "Good or bad?"

"I can't say over the phone, sir," Spicer explained, but it seemed to me that his voice sounded encouraging. "When can you get to London?"

I told him that I would be at his office soon after mid-day.

It was, I remember, a beautiful Spring morning and from the window of the train I could see the primroses dappling the woodlands and the first splashes of cherry blossom in the passing gardens. It was, I thought, a day when one felt justified in believing in one's luck.

At Scotland Yard, I filled in the green form requesting to see Spicer and stated my business. The huge, roundabout policeman—a veritable museum piece—escorted me to the lift.

"A perfect day, sir," he remarked.

"It is indeed," I agreed.

"The Fraud Squad you wanted, sir, wasn't it?" he asked, peering at the form.

"The Fraud Squad," I told him.

Spicer and one of his associates stood together in the office. He introduced me and we shook hands.

I noticed that both men were wearing their hats and overcoats, and wondered why. Spicer, I thought, looked worried.

"I'm afraid, sir, that I have bad news for you," he said very quietly. "I have a warrant here for your arrest."

I felt sick.

"And now," Spicer said, "I must read you the warrant."

As far as I can recall, I did not hear a word of it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SINCE IT WAS nearly one o'clock and I had yet to be taken to Savile Row Police Station before appearing at Marlborough Street Police Court at two o'clock, I had little time left in which to find a friend who would stand bail for me. From Spicer's office I made several calls without success.

"Won't they accept my own bail?" I asked.

Spicer shook his head. "I'm afraid not. You can put up two hundred and fifty pounds in your own surety, but you must find someone who is prepared to put up the same amount."

"And if I can't?" I queried, looking at the clock.

"You'll be remanded in custody and I wouldn't like to see you in Brixton," he said significantly.

"Why, is it very uncomfortable?" I asked innocently.

"I wouldn't like to see you there, sir—not even for a night," he added.

I telephoned one last remaining friend. She courageously consented to leave a luncheon party in order to appear at the police court.

Then, together with Spicer and his colleague, I went by taxi to Savile Row, where I was formally charged with conspiring together with Julius Herman Gert, Peter Alan Gert and persons unknown to defraud. My finger prints were taken, my valuables removed and I was locked in a cell. Since it contained a water-closet and its walls were scrawled over with obscenities, I felt that I had been locked up in a public lavatory.

An hour later, having driven with Spicer in a "Black Maria" to the Police Court, I appeared before Mr. Paul Bennett, V.C., and was remanded on bail for ten days.

Only once during the period between my two appearances at the police court and my trial at the Old Bailey did I briefly consider that the whole grim business was too much to endure. Already my case had received a considerable amount of publicity in the newspapers, I was feeling exhausted and I knew that whatever might be the outcome of my trial, I would be penniless at the end of it. I sat alone in the flat at Notting Hill taking stock of my situation. I was middle-aged and it seemed highly unlikely that I could find myself a job again in Fleet Street. Long ago before the war, I had written about yachts and yachting. Now, the newspapers had little space to spare for that pastime and, in any case, other and younger men were more conversant with the game than I was. While awaiting arrest, I had finished my play. But in my present frame of mind I was no judge of its merits, and as I had no money to spend convincing friends in the theatre over luncheons at the Ivy or the Caprice that it was worthwhile, the chances were that the play would never be produced. One way and another that evening, it seemed that the prospect before me was so forlorn as to be unendurable. And over it all hung the awful shadow of my trial and the hideous publicity attending it. At that moment, none of this did I feel that I could bear. I thought of the gas oven in the kitchen, but could not tolerate such an end. I decided that to open a vein would be easier and less distressing for I remembered watching a sailor bleed to death during the war and reflected now how tranquil had been his end. I went to the nearby public house and drank several large whiskies, before buying a bottle of gin, and toyed with the idea of

running away to France or Italy. But I discarded the plan because it would have meant the loss of two hundred and fifty pounds to the friend who was standing bail for me. Besides, it offered no real solution to my problem. So I carried home the bottle of gin, drank nearly half its contents, and found a razor blade. Then the telephone bell rang. An old friend, who sounded nearly as drunk as I was, insisted that he must call to see me. I put away the razor blade with a slight feeling of shame and struggled hard to conserve the remains of the gin until my guest arrived.

Such a confession, I fear, sounds insincere and melodramatic. Yet it is no more than a statement of the truth and I set it down now simply as evidence of the curious machinations of the human mind in moments of distress.

I do not intend to dwell upon my trial at the Old Bailey which was held during the first week in May. It was a terrible ordeal. I suppose that had I been charged with murder, the ordeal would have been harder to bear because the possibility of being proved guilty would then have had more extenuating results. Nevertheless, I am inclined to agree with Lord Samuel who said that the suffering and shame following one's arrest and during one's trial are infinitely greater than during one's actual term of imprisonment. I hope that never again shall I endure two days of suspense such as I experienced as I stood in the dock and the witness-box at the Old Bailey.

I have often been asked since whether I expected to be convicted. Looking back on it now, in spite of all the encouragement and sympathy I received during those two days, not only from friends but also from complete strangers, I do not think that I ever expected to be found anything but guilty. There was a moment when my hopes ran high. When a young man, called

Vernon Mitchell, having read the account of the first day of my trial, came forward and said that he had been the victim of the Gerts' duplicity in Johannesburg. He went into the witness-box and told the story of their swindles in that city; swindles amounting to more than £170,000. It was a story that followed in every detail identically the same pattern as my own. But in spite of this last-minute effort on the part of a courageous young man and the able defence and eloquent speech made by my counsel, the jury found me guilty.

I do not believe that any twelve men could have looked at me and listened to me in court for the best part of two days and have decided that I could have been so completely blind to the truth. Had the Gerts—Jupie and Peter—stood beside me in the dock, I have no doubt but that the members of the jury would have arrived at a different verdict. But it is superfluous to surmise. In the circumstances, I think the jury were justified in finding me guilty, for surely no man had the right to be such a bloody fool as I had been?

Finally, the Recorder of London, Sir Gerald Dodson, sent me to prison for the term of eighteen months.

What happened to me while I was in prison I have already described.* After receiving the full remission of a third of my sentence, I was released from Maidstone Gaol on April 22nd, 1953.

"I sat in the corner seat of the carriage, looking out of the window at the Kentish countryside, glorious in the morning sunlight, and saw the orchards white with blossom, and the oasthouses and the red-roofed cottages and the towers of the village churches rising above the great elms and high oaks, pale green with their spring foliage.

"To the gathering momentum of the train, the

* (See *Eighteen Months*, Allan Wingate, 10/6).

rhythm of the wheels seemed to sing: 'You're free! . . . thump-thump . . . You're FREE!' "

With those lines, I ended the story of my year in prison.

All my life I have possessed a curious resilience under the stress of suffering, whether mental or physical, that cannot be accounted for either by a bad memory or lack of imagination. Neither has it anything to do with courage, for which it has often been mistaken. It is due, I believe, to the fact that I am an incurable optimist with a passionate zest for living. I have never been capable of regretting the past, for that has always seemed to me a moribund emotion. Because of this resilience, I am sometimes accused of insensitivity and many of my friends who met me at the time of my release remarked how little the experiences of the past year had affected me. In fact, I was conscious of having undergone a strange metamorphosis during my captivity. While I was not embittered by it, I felt that because of it I had acquired—like a turtle—a hard outer shell that seemed to protect me and provide me with all the shelter that I needed. It gave me an odd sense of security, so that I feared neither poverty nor hardship nor yet felt the loss of my money and personal possessions. It made me excitedly self-sufficient.

From the gaol I went to the flat of the same faithful friend with whom I had lived at Notting Hill and who now, mercifully, had moved to Brompton Square. He had managed to conserve intact my clothes and my few personal belongings. When I arrived, he awaited me with a steaming hot bath, clean clothes and a breakfast of fresh coffee, hot croissants and my favourite brand of marmalade. He asked no questions, greeting me as lightly as if I had just come up from the country on a visit.

After I had bathed and over breakfast together we reviewed my situation. Its prospect was scarcely

roseate. While I had been in prison, my comedy, *Spring Collection*, had been given a try-out at the White Rock Theatre at Hastings. From the week's run of the play I had earned a few pounds in royalties and the management that had produced it had bought a six months' option on the play for fifty pounds. Temporarily, therefore, I had a little money on which to live. But, since bankruptcy papers had been served on me shortly before I left prison, it seemed unlikely that I would ever be able to earn enough to pay my debts.

"I am determined," I said, finishing my coffee and lighting a cigarette that tasted the more fragrant since I had not rolled it myself, "I am absolutely determined to make a living again from writing."

"You told me that in every letter that you wrote to me," my friend reminded me. "Do you think that you can do it?"

"I'm going to have a damned good try," I told him for I was flushed with a new sense of freedom when all things seemed possible.

Over the remains of the breakfast, I outlined the book that I had in mind to write. "It's to be all about prisons," I said. "But not about myself. I shall merely be the narrator. But never have I wanted to do anything so much as I want to write this book."

"Your typewriter is in the cupboard," Gerald told me. "I somehow managed never to pop it," he added with a laugh and I knew that the past year had not been easy for him either.

I began the book within a few days of my release. I wrote it in friends' houses and in ill-furnished rooms, unswept by sluttish maids. And while I wrote it my money ran out so that often I was hungry and at times I went without food. I took a job as a barman in an out-of-hours' drinking club in order to live and eat, while writing in the mornings before going to work.

In the end, I finished the book, and in the end, after the manuscript had been sent by my agent to many publishers and, I think, offered to the editors of every newspaper in London with a view to selling the serial rights, it was accepted by Allan Wingate.

I called at 12 Beauchamp Place to see Charles Fry and Anthony Gibbs, the directors of that firm.

"You have a good story here but it simply won't do in its present form. It's too disjointed," they told me in so many words.

"How then do you suggest that I should tell it?" I asked, for I was prepared to re-write the manuscript as often as they wished, provided that they would eventually publish it.

"Start at the beginning and end at the end," Anthony Gibbs advised.

Armed with hope and a cheque in advance of royalties, I went away and followed that advice. I re-wrote the story of my year in prison from beginning to end. As I pounded away on my typewriter, there were moments when I could hardly believe in my good luck. Even as I write it now, I am conscious that the story of my change of fortune must sound positively novelettish in its improbability. For it is, in fact, the story of the penniless down-and-out from gaol who found success. That the hero of the story happens to be rising fifty and grey-headed, ungilds the gingerbread considerably, but adds to the absurd unreality of it all. If I was relying upon my imagination for what happened, I would never dare to relate what in fact occurred. For when the book was finished, the editor of a great Sunday newspaper, having read the manuscript, sent for the author and offered him a handsome sum for the serial rights.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE MANAGING EDITOR of *The People* spun round in his swivel chair and sat with his back to his desk and with his feet on the hot-water pipes.

"It's an amazing story. Why don't you write it?" he asked.

I had just finished telling him the story of my association with the Gerts.

"It had never occurred to me to," I said.

"Well, think about it now," he told me. Then he asked: "Where are these people?"

I told him that so far as I knew they were somewhere in South America.

Stuart Campbell thought for a few seconds and said: "If I find out where they are, have you the guts to go to see them?"

I could only answer yes to his question for it was not really a question at all—it was a challenge.

"Very well," he smiled. "I'll find out and you go. I'll pay part of the expenses of the trip and if there's a story, I'll think about publishing it. How's that?"

"Fair enough," I answered.

He walked with me across the big outer office, where one or two journalists in their shirt sleeves picked out their copy on typewriters.

"I'll set the wheels in motion and when we run these pals of yours to earth, I'll let you know," he said as we shook hands.

I walked through the drizzle of rain down Long

Acre amid the smell of the oranges in the warehouses and went into a pub to have a drink. I was still living in a strange dream sequence from which I almost feared that I must eventually wake up.

Often in prison, when I was locked up in my cell for the night, I had lain awake thinking about meeting the Gerts again. I used to pretend that somehow or other I had made my way to South America, by working my passage on a cargo ship or even by earning enough money to pay my fare. I pictured myself taking them by surprise—walking into their apartment or office and saying: "Here I am." For a time, meeting the Gerts became dangerously near to growing into an obsession with me, so that I tried to avoid thinking about them. For in prison, obsessions can destroy one if one gives way to them. So when I began to hate the Gerts for being free and pity myself for being in prison, I gave up all those delectable dreams of punching Peter on the nose or publicly denouncing Jupie in Buenos Aires or Rio.

But now those dreams of mine looked like materializing and I was in a dither of excitement. I walked home hardly aware that the drizzle had turned to heavy rain, thinking not only that I might meet the Gerts but be able to expose them more publicly than I could ever dare to have hoped. What better retribution than to write a book about them as Stuart Campbell had suggested?

Under the arches of the Ritz Hotel, I suddenly thought of the title of the book and knew that I would write it. It would be called *Crime Without Punishment*. For one brief moment, I considered descending to the Ritz Bar for a drink. Then, fearing the ghosts of the past, I went my way.

The more I thought about the new book, the more I realised that there was still a great deal concerning the Gerts' past that I had yet to find out.

From a drawer in my desk I took a bundle of papers that I had preserved from the time of my trial. Amongst them was a cutting from *The Daily Mail* that in a concise form told a good deal of the story. It was headed dramatically, "Hunt for King of Fraud".

"A Doctor of Philosophy," its author wrote, "and his wife and son are now safe within the Argentine living on the proceeds of a world-wide £500,000 share-pushing racket. They have a beautiful villa in Buenos Aires and they are safe because there is no extradition from Argentina. The three people whom the police throughout the world want to arrest are Dr. Julius Herman Gert, Doctor of Philosophy at Vienna University, his son, Peter Alan, and the doctor's wife, Clari.

"At the Old Bailey yesterday father and son were described as 'clever, artful and accomplished frauds who should be in the dock,' and the Recorder of London (Sir Gerald Dodson) told the jury: 'Perhaps these two will come before this court after much water has gone under the bridges.'

"As a result of their deceitful operations, Anthony Brooke Heckstall-Smith, a distinguished naval officer with a D.S.C. and two mentions in dispatches, was sentenced to 18 months' jail for fraudulently converting £3,350 paid for gold-mining shares.

"He was duped by the so-called banker and his son, who financed him in setting up Heckstall-Smith and Co., stock and share dealers, circulating doctors and dentists offering them gold-mining shares in South Africa.

"Scotland Yard have known about the Gerts since 1925. They were then trading in London in a leather business which smashed. Following inquiries Gert was 'gated' from this country and returned to his native Vienna.

"When the Nazis came into power the Gert family went to Johannesburg and to all intents and purposes became South African citizens. This benign-looking, elderly Dr. Gert, who professed in South Africa to be a medical specialist and was known as Doctor Julius, became quite a figure in society there.

"Mr. Vernon Mitchell, a South African, yesterday went voluntarily to the Old Bailey to give evidence for Heckstall-Smith, and told how he himself had been duped by the clever Gerts.

"Mr. Mitchell told me: 'I first met young Peter, the son. He was a charming fellow, and later he introduced me to his father. After two months' persuasion I threw up my job to join them in the publicity business.

" 'I really do not know what their other companies amounted to. But they cleaned up about £150,000 in South Africa and vanished.'

"Then came the Gert family's world tour, leaving behind them a trail of dupes and frauds. For everywhere they went there was the same lavish style of living . . . Italy, Switzerland, France and then London, where the Home Office had lifted all 'gating orders' of twenty years ago . . . Then to Canada, where the Canadian Commission dealing with stocks and shares chased them out after a long run of fraud . . ."

As I read again that article after two years, I thought how half-hearted had been the hunt for the "King of Fraud", and how easily and often he had been allowed to slip through the fingers of justice.

Was Jupie even now established in palatial offices in Buenos Aires selling shares to unsuspecting Argentines? Had he found another fool like myself whom he was using as a screen? I desperately wanted to know the answers to those questions, and in my impatience I went one morning to Scotland Yard and asked to see Spicer. I was told that he was away.

"Does anyone know where the Gerts are?" I inquired.

I was told that Spicer probably knew, but there was no one else who could answer my question.

Through my lawyers, I sought information from the Home Office. An official wrote: "The Secretary of State does not consider, on the evidence before him, that it would be in the public interest to apply for the return of Julius and Peter Alan Gert to this country at public expense." The letter stated that warrants for the arrest of Jupie and Peter were in existence, and would be executed if they returned to this country, and added that it was "understood that the two men were at present in Brazil, where extradition proceedings could not in any event be taken against them, since there is no extradition treaty between Great Britain and Brazil."

I searched for and found Mr. Vernon Mitchell, hoping that he might be able to tell me more of the Gerts' activities in Johannesburg.

"So far as I know," he told me, "there is a warrant out for their arrest only for defrauding me of four hundred pounds. No one else brought proceedings against them."

He explained that in South Africa the authorities were averse to publicising the misdemeanours of whites, with the result that the Gerts' case was scarcely reported in the press.

Over cups of tea, I heard again how Jupie had cheated Mitchell.

"I arrived at the office one morning after a weekend, to find that they had gone. In three cars, which they had just bought, they had driven hell-for-leather to Lourenco Marques, where they were safe. One fellow, who they had robbed, followed them there, but there was nothing he could do. I wonder how much longer they will get away with it? I'd like to think that their

crimes will catch up with them one of these days," he added.

"So would I," I told him.

It was then that I decided that I must go back to Florence.

At the time of my trial, my lawyers had received a letter from a solicitor in Florence, stating that he represented a client who had been the victim of the Gerts' frauds and offering to supply any information that might help my case. I had not then been able to afford the expense of sending a representative to Italy and, in any case, I was advised that to have done so would have been of no advantage. But now, I felt that I must go to Florence.

"The story wouldn't be complete unless I go there," I explained to Stuart Campbell.

"If you feel like that about it, go there," he said. "It shouldn't take you long. While you're here," he added casually, "you may as well read this. It'll probably interest you."

He handed me a cable.

"Julius running Forest Hotel and Restaurant, near Kingston, specialising continental foods, nineteen beds. Peter employed B.O.A.C. local office." The cable was from Jamaica, and Stuart watched me with an amused smile as I read it.

"Will you go there?" he asked.

"Of course, I will," I told him, "the moment I get back from Florence." Then I asked him: "How the devil did you find this out?"

He looked at me over the top of his spectacles and his expression was inscrutable. "Through the usual channels," he replied.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

IN THE shadows of the Excelsior Hotel, I thought I saw the sleek, black shape of a Phantom 11 Rolls-Royce and espied in the moonlight the glitter of the silvern angel on its long bonnet. But it was just another ghost, for Florence was a city of ghosts. Everywhere I was haunted by them. They propped up the bar at Layland's, they sat at the iron tables outside Gatti's Café, lurked in the narrow streets and dark doorways like Medician conspirators, and winked at me from the wall of the Arno. There was no escaping them. They mocked me whenever I climbed the stairs of the little albergo where I stayed and as I sought out cheap restaurants in which to eat. Even in the bright sunlight of springtime they laughed at me as I toiled up the countless steps to the Piazzale Michelangelo. On my second evening in Florence, they beckoned me irresistably into the bar of the Excelsior Hotel.

I hesitated in the hall, hastily counting my lire. The concierge came from behind his desk to greet me.

"Commandante! It has been too long since we have seen you," he said warmly.

"Four years," I said, shaking his hands.

"It is like old times to see you back," he told me.

"Not quite," I remarked, thinking of the small roll of notes in my pocket, "times change and not always for the better."

The concierge shrugged his shoulders. Then he said: "I think you will find an old friend in the bar, Commandante."

"You mean . . .?"

He smiled discreetly and bowed his head. "The Frau Baroness. She has been staying with us since a week. She will be pleased to see you."

I admit without shame that my heart fluttered. "I will go to the bar," I said. But I paused for a moment to study my reflection in a mirror. Did I look so very much older? Was it only in my imagination that my hair seemed thinner and whiter? At any rate, my grey suit was well pressed and the cuffs of my silk shirt were not frayed. I could yet afford a champagne cocktail.

Tiella was sitting at the bar on a high stool, one long leg crossed over the other. She wore a red dress with a broad black belt round her ridiculously small waist. I could not resist slipping my arm round it.

"What is Madame drinking?" I asked.

She gave a small cry and spun round on her stool.

"Toni! I am seeing a ghost!"

"I have seen many!" I laughed.

She looked as agelessly beautiful as ever. How, I thought, her contemporaries must envy her that superb bone structure that gave her features such perfect moulding.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked.

"It'll take me a long time to answer that question," I told her.

"Then let us dine together and you can tell me slowly," she suggested.

"Tiella," I said, "I must tell you at once that I am now a poor man. If we dine together, it must be cheaply."

Tiella laughed and took my hand. "Mon pauvre! How could that matter? Besides, since two years I

have been re-united with Otto." Otto was a Swedish industrialist of extreme wealth, with whom Tiella had formerly lived. She now hastened to assure me that he was in New York on business. "So you will be my guest and we will pretend that I am very old and you are very young and my gigolo!" she laughed gaily. Then she ordered champagne cocktails.

That night as we dined together, the ghosts were dispelled and Florence regained its old enchantment. Under the spell of the sparkling red wine that we drank, I felt that I had recovered a little of my youthfulness and I know that Tiella appeared more lovely. Her sympathy magically healed many wounds and the cool touch of her hand refreshed me.

"And so you are going to Jamaica to find these abominable creatures?" Tiella's violet eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Yes, I'm going," I told her.

"But you will be careful," she said, pressing my hand.

"There is nothing to fear," I said, feeling splendidly brave.

"You cannot be sure," Tiella insisted and I adored her for the note of anxiety in her voice. "And when you have finished with Jamaica—what then?" she asked.

"I don't know," I answered, yet I felt fairly certain that I would return to Florence.

The following day I went about my business. In an office in the Via Della Studio, I talked with the barrister who had defended the Gerts' victim. The case against that unfortunate man was still pending, his counsel explained.

"You see," he said, "there is an extradition order in existence for these people and, in this country, two cases will be brought against them. One in the Civil Court and the other in the Criminal Court, and neither

can be heard until Julius and Peter are brought back to Italy."

"What exactly did they do here?" I asked.

"They were brilliant rogues. They established their clients' confidence by selling them perfectly reliable shares that gave them at first a profit. Then, later, they convinced their clients that they should sell these shares and buy others at the moment standing high on the market. They seemed to have some inside knowledge that such shares would fall in price rapidly. When they did fall, they told their clients that they should wait and not sell. But, of course, they had never really bought any such shares, sending only the contract notes to these poor people," the barrister explained.

"The same old story," I said, "with a slight difference—they didn't sell any dud shares."

"Did they do that in England?" he asked.

"They had a damned good try," I told him.

"Here, that was not necessary, because, as I say, they seemed so clever at finding shares that fell until they had no value," he smiled.

"Is it true that Doctor Gert owed a very large sum of money in income tax?" I asked.

The barrister spread his hands. "That I cannot say. You see, before they escaped, these people destroyed all their accounts. They were too clever to leave behind them any traces that would have incriminated themselves. They wished only that my client should be suspected."

I asked where the Gerts had gone from Florence.

"They went, I understand, to Switzerland," he answered. "One weekend they took all their belongings and left Florence in their cars. One day they were here and the next they were gone."

"Did they get away with much money?" I questioned him.

"Approximately one hundred and ten million lire," he told me, and I made a rather amateurish attempt to transform that sum into sterling.

"I think that you should meet the Public Prosecutor as he can introduce you to the police who can no doubt give you more information than I can," he suggested. "If you can spare the time, we will go now to the office of Signor Buffoni De Fraia."

I said that I could spare all the time in the world and so we went together to the Law Courts, climbing the fine old stone staircase to the Public Prosecutor's office.

Signor De Fraia referred to a large file of documents.

"A little more than two years ago," he said, "we started extradition proceedings against the Gerts in Brazil, but before the order was approved, they escaped to Montevideo."

"And now," I asked, "what happens?"

The Signor shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he answered. "It depends upon the Ministry of Justice in Rome. Each time that these people escape us and go to another country, it means that we have to start new proceedings and translate all the documents, of which you can imagine there are many, into another language. Such things take time. But I will telephone to the police that they are to see you and tell you what they know," he added obligingly.

As I walked to the police headquarters, I could not help but think how much more helpful and energetic were the authorities in Italy than their counterparts in London. I was surprised, too, that the Italians could afford the expense of extraditing the Gerts while we could not.

In the records at the police headquarters I saw photographs of Jupie and Peter looking palpably criminal. A gnomelike little detective informed me that he knew all about the Gerts.

"They are now in Jamaica and before that they were in the Port of Spain. I hope that we will yet catch up with them," he said, his wrinkled face puckering into a humourless smile.

"When?" I asked.

The little man spread his hands and pouted his lips and gave that curious sort of grunt that all Italians use when lost for an answer.

The fate of the Gerts seemed to be in the hands of the Minister of Justice in Rome. Recently, I gathered, there had been some kind of amnesty of criminals in Italy that had to do with the Government's fight against Communism. But the intricacies of this political move were far beyond my understanding and I could only gather that because of them it was possible the case against the Gerts might be dropped. I said vehemently that I hoped this would not be so, and the gnome, with a fiendish grin that made me almost fear for Jupie and Peter, agreed with me. He even suggested that I should write to the Minister of Justice personally pressing him to pursue the case. I assured him that nothing would give me greater pleasure. But not, I thought privily, until I returned from Jamaica.

A morbid curiosity drew me that same day to the Via Dei Benci. I stood across the narrow street from the doorway of Number 20 and looked up at the windows of Jupie's old office, wondering vaguely who might now occupy it. Then I walked back to the Piazza Republico and sat down at Clari's table outside Gatti's Café. Instead of a cassata, I ordered a glass of chianti. I was to dine again with Tiella that evening and if I was to do myself credit, it was important that I should throw off the feeling of weariness that had suddenly overcome me. I swallowed my wine and called the waiter to bring me another glass. The ghosts were creeping up on me again. I could almost

hear the faint flutter of Clari's little fan and the guttural rumble of old Jupie's laughter. I thought of the smile on the gnomelike face of the detective, and shuddered. I wondered again, as I had wondered thousands of times before, whether I really hated the Gerts. If I did, did I hate them enough to want them to fall into the hirsute, spidery hands of the little detective? I did not doubt but that they thoroughly deserved such a fate. But did I wish it for them? I simply did not know. There were times—and this was one—when I told myself that I was incapable of hatred. Whether the lack of such a passion in my make-up portrayed weakness of character, I was uncertain. That evening, I carried my problem to Tiella.

"It's because you're English," she told me. "The English are unable to hate. Look how easily they can forgive my people. But, Toni, you must go on with this thing. You must think not only of what these Gerts have done to you, but to all those other people, who haven't your luck—or your courage. Think, too, what cruel and vile things they can still do unless someone stops them. That is what you must remember when you start to be soft-hearted."

"I'll try to," I said.

"For God's sake don't let them fool you again," she said vehemently. "And whatever happens, you mustn't feel sorry for them. Not any of them. Not even that old witch with the whispering thighs!" she added with a laugh.

"What a memory you have!" I exclaimed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

DAWN WAS breaking over the Island as we steamed slowly into the great harbour of Kingston. The towering mountains, their peaks still hidden in the feathery, dispersing mist, were indigo-blue against the opalescent sky. The lights of the town sparkled and high up the mountainside a straggling cluster of lights—like a diadem—marked the little garrison post of Newcastle.

I lent on the rail of the banana boat, looking across the harbour. This was the end of a fortnight's voyage, through ten days of which we had been battered by an Atlantic gale. I was heartily bored by the ship that was old and creaked ceaselessly like an aged Edwardian dowager in steel-boned corsets. I was tired, too, of my fellow passengers as, indeed, they were just as tired of me. I had consumed a book a day from the ship's little library and a great deal too many drinks. Through lack of exercise, I felt liverish and ill-tempered and impatient to get ashore.

"What do you think of it? You must admit that it looks rather lovely."

I looked round and saw that Mrs. Dale was standing beside me. Her name was not really Mrs. Dale. I had merely christened her with that name because she was a tiresome, busy-bodying creature who reminded me of that torturing character, who to the accompaniment of harps, persecuted one twice daily on the wireless.

"To me it looks like Heaven as seen during one's last moments in purgatory," I said, but the inference was lost of the woman.

"Don't forget what I told you about it," she said with a cheerfulness that could not be excused at dawn. "Remember that it's simply not safe to walk about Kingston at night alone."

I wondered if she spoke from personal experience but decided to the contrary, for not even the most myopic amorist could have overlooked Mrs. Dale's moustache. It was of proportions to be admired by any ambitious young guardee.

"It is quite scandalous," she began again, and as some days previously, she had cornered me in the lounge to regale me with alarming tales of robbery and rape after dark in the streets of Kingston, I muttered my excuses and fled.

I sought out the "Merry Widow" in her cabin. She was having difficulty with her packing and swore darkly to herself.

"Leave the whole thing to your stewardess. She is far more capable than you and her hand is steadier," I said.

"Don't be a bastard!" she chuckled.

"I am, in fact, a ministering angel," I said, "for in my cabin I have a bottle of Mumm on ice. Or if you prefer it, a *fine* with some strong black coffee."

The "Merry Widow's" name was Hilda. She was as selfishly independent as a Siamese cat and equally as graceful, so that she had been much married and divorced. Because she could be quite unexpectedly bawdy, without ever becoming vulgar, and even at the vortex of the gale appeared immaculately unperturbed, I numbered her among my favourite women.

"Come," I said, "let's have that last drink before landing."

Hilda climbed from her knees and glanced in the mirror.

"I look like hell," she said.

"No woman ever says that unless she is convinced that it's not true," I told her. "But come—the ice is melting."

For several days I had been turning over in my mind the question of whether I should tell Hilda why I was voyaging to Jamaica. Now that we were about to land, I was more than ever conscious of the loneliness of my mission. With the exception of the Gerts, I did not know a single soul on the whole Island. I felt desperately in need of a confidant. Just in case, I kept telling myself, although in case of what I could never quite decide. I had thought that during the voyage I would formulate some sort of plan of campaign. But I was now no nearer to that plan than I had been when we sailed from Avonmouth two weeks ago. Stuart Campbell had told me to find out all that I could about Jupie's activities.

"Find out what he's doing," he had said. "Why he's running this hotel. Why he's in Jamaica at all and what his plans are. Don't, if you can avoid it, let him know why you're there. And don't, if you can avoid that, too, have a show-down with him. Anyway, not until you've got the story."

I think that I realised now that it was impossible to make any plan, because I simply could not imagine what would happen if and when I met the Gerts.

I had tried often enough to picture that meeting. But the scenes I had played out to myself had no more relationship to reality than those of a play whose author had been unable to determine what was to happen to his characters in the last act. And it was because of this uncertainty that I felt I needed to tell someone why I was going to Kingston. Oddly enough,

Hilda was not the only person I felt that I could take into my confidence, but also the right person. To begin with, she was, as they say, hard-boiled enough not to be in the least shocked by the fact that I had been in prison. I was certain that at times she had lived dangerously, and being a thoroughly practical creature, she would grasp the whole situation without asking a lot of superfluous questions. Quite definitely, she would not gossip.

"I'm very flattered that you should trust me," she said, when I had finished my story. "But I don't quite see why you've told me."

"Just in case," I said. "In case of what, I can't say. I don't imagine for one moment that anything can happen to me, but just supposing that it did, it would be nice to think that you know the whole story and could ring up the police and put them wise," I explained hoping that I did not sound absurdly cloak-and-dagger.

Hilda laughed. "If anything like that did happen, it would be small satisfaction to you whether the police knew or not!"

"On the final count, I should hate to feel that the Gerts got away with it," I said, refilling her glass.

"I tell you what I'll do," Hilda said, lighting a cigarette. "I'll find out all I can about these pals of yours and let you know. I'll telephone you at your hotel to-morrow evening. I imagine you'll be staying at the old Turtle Tank?" The Turtle Tank was the name by which the Myrtle Bank Hotel was locally known.

"I'll be there," I said, and because she was that sort of woman, I knew that she would keep her word. I felt suddenly more sure of myself and considerably less lonely, now that I had let her into my secret. If Jupie shot me dead or Clari poisoned my goulash or Peter ran me over with his car, I was confident that Hilda

would see that they swung for it and enjoy doing her duty.

She finished her champagne, setting the empty glass firmly on the side of the wash-basin.

"Thanks for the drink," she said. "I feel better for it. Now perhaps I can cope with those bloody suit-cases."

I felt a little lonely again as I watched Hilda get into a big, black limousine beside a handsome Cuban, who was to be her host on the Island. But, as I sweated in the corrugated iron Customs shed, waiting for my luggage, I consoled myself that I had at least one reliable friend in Jamaica.

I drove through the squalid slums around the docks and down Harbour Street to the Myrtle Bank Hotel, my mind concentrated on the first fresh-water bath that I was to have in more than two weeks.

There is a saying in Jamaica that "life begins at the Myrtle Bank", and I imagine that it is fairly true, for even to-day when the great air liners fly their passengers not to Kingston, but to the longer runway of the airport at Montego Bay, there are still few visitors to Jamaica who do not stay at some time or another at the Myrtle Bank. Its position is unique, for it stands in an oasis of green lawns, Royal palms and flower beds aflame with tropical plants, surrounded by docks and slums.

By luncheon time, I had already begun to dislike Jamaica. I hated the humid heat and the hot Trade Winds that set the palm trees rattling and that made me feel nervously irritable and restless.

That first afternoon, to escape the heat, I threw myself into the hotel swimming-pool by the edge of the sea, and lay there watching the great vultures floating on the wind on huge ragged wings. Then, quite suddenly, the sky darkened and it began to rain. It continued to rain in torrents until sundown. But the rain brought no relief from the intense heat. Indeed,

it seemed only to increase one's discomfort as the parched earth began to steam. So I took refuge in the hotel's air-conditioned bar, drowning my loneliness in iced rum and fresh lime juice.

I was joined in the bar by a chatty American, who told me that he was a mining engineer from New York. Over a drink, I asked him about Kingston.

"What is there to do in the evening?"

"On Sunday evening, unless you go to a movie, damn all," he told me.

I suggested that a stroll might be pleasant for the rain had ceased by then.

The American looked surprised.

"Brother, you can't do that in this place!" he exclaimed.

"Do you mean that?" I asked, disbelievingly.

"I sure do," he said. "But I'll prove it to you, if you like."

"I think I would like," I said.

We finished our drinks and walking out of the hotel grounds turned left, along Harbour Street. We went slowly for the night was hot.

From out of the shadows across the street I saw a coloured girl in a vivid yellow dress darting towards us. The engineer saw her, too.

"Here we go!" he laughed. "This is it!"

The whore fell in alongside us, begging a cigarette. The engineer gave her one and provided a light. Then she began to sell her wares. When we showed no interest, she screamed her indignation.

"What's thermadderwiv you? You no like coloured girls?" she yelled. We explained that the question of colour did not concern us. We were merely taking the evening air. The whore was persistent. She would show us lovely Chinese girls in a house just round the corner. We bade her good-night, but she would not leave us, walking beside us and jeering at us.

Presently, she was joined by a friend, who demanded cigarettes.

"They're beginning to gang up on us," my companion muttered under his breath.

"Please go away," I begged politely.

"You dirty snob Englishman. You think coloured girls no good. You say they stink!" the creature taunted.

"Go away!" I said, growing annoyed, for I saw that our party was becoming the centre of interest in the street. I looked round for a policeman. There was not one to be seen.

"Jesus! Here comes her boy friend," the engineer said. "Let's get the hell out of it."

As we turned back towards the hotel, I saw a negro in ragged clothes come out of a nearby bar and patter barefoot across the street.

"Scram, will you," the engineer shouted angrily at the now screaming houris.

"Say, what's the matter? What you do to them girls?" the coloured man was shouting.

But we did not wait to tell him. We made a dive for the lighted entrance of our hotel.

"Well, have I proved my point?" the American asked laconically when we reached the sanctuary of the air-conditioned bar.

"Quite clearly," I laughed. "But I would never have believed you unless I'd seen it for myself."

"Brother, you're in Kingston, Jamaica, and I reckon that's just about the lowest dump on earth. And I'd like you to know that I've travelled around quite a bit," he added.

I went to bed agreeing with him, for I, too, had travelled fairly extensively. I fell asleep disliking Kingston quite heartily at the end of my first day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I AWOKE THE next morning refreshed by my first night's sleep in a bed that did not creak and in a room that remained still.

I woke, too, with a feeling of excitement for to-day I had made up my mind, if not to meet Peter Gert, at least to have a look at him. '

After I had breakfasted quite deliciously on fresh fruit and coffee, I lit a cigar, just to give myself confidence, and strolled once more down Harbour Street. The offices of the B.O.A.C. were but a short distance from the hotel on the opposite side of the street. Finding a convenient doorway *vis-a-vis* the office, which was windowless and open to the pavement, I took up my stand, feeling comfortably incognito behind my dark glasses.

Then I saw Peter sitting at the counter beside another clerk. He wore a white shirt with single gold stripes on his shoulders, and was busy with two customers.

I felt my heart beating faster, and, quite absurdly, thought of an old drawing by Du Maurier, in an early edition of *Trilby* that I possessed. It was a drawing of Svengali and under it was the dramatic caption: "Hast thou found me, oh, mine enemy?"

I had found Peter. I thought of the last time I had seen him waiting for me at the Air Terminus at Victoria. Waiting for me to sign those blank sheets of the company's notepaper.

He looked fatter now and a good deal more at ease. I wondered what he would do if he looked up from his work and recognised me. I wondered what he would do if I suddenly crossed the street and walked right up to the counter and spoke to him. I was seized with a mad desire to dash into the office and make a scene. I wanted to shout out at the top of my voice: "This man is a bloody crook! He's a liar, a thief and a rogue!" I wanted desperately to punch Peter right on the nose.

Instead I walked back past the hotel to the shipping offices where I made inquiries about a return passage to England, for before I met the Gerts, I wanted to be quite sure when I could leave the Island.

I was more than a little taken aback when the clerk told me that all the ships were full until the end of August, five months hence.

"We can put your name on the waiting list," the young man told me, "but we can't offer you much hope."

"What about some of the other lines?" I suggested.

"You'll find they are much the same, sir," he answered. "If you're in a hurry, your best plan is to go by plane."

I walked back to the hotel faced with a problem. As I saw it, flying home meant travelling by B.O.A.C., and the moment I started dealing with that company, the Gerts would immediately know that I was in Jamaica. I went into the air-conditioned bar and ordered a drink. The situation needed careful consideration. In roughly two weeks, *The People* would publish the first instalment of the serial of my book, *Eighteen Months*. In his introduction to that serial I had no means of knowing if Stuart Campbell would mention the Gerts by name. If he did, the chances were that, as the paper might reach the Island a day or two after publication, it would then be no longer possible for me to bluff the Gerts as to why I was in

Jamaica. Obviously, I decided, I must arrange for my homeward journey within the next ten days. Finishing my drink, I went to the little B.O.A.C. desk in the hall of the hotel and told the girl that I wanted a passage to London.

"I don't want to leave later than April 4th," I said.

"I can't offer you a direct flight," she said. "But I can get you a reservation on the plane, *via* New York, leaving here on April 1st."

"That will do," I said, feeling relieved. "Please tell your London Office to get in touch with Mr. Stuart Campbell, the Editor of *The People*, and arrange with him to pay the fare in London."

I watched her note down my instructions, together with my name, on a printed form, knowing that the latter would shortly be passed to the main office. If it was inevitable that Peter should know that I was in the Island, I considered that he might also know that I had powerful friends such as Stuart in London.

That afternoon, I took another walk past the B.O.A.C. Office and saw that Peter was still at his desk. Then I returned to the hotel and went for a swim in the pool, nursing the satisfaction that Peter was probably spending a highly uncomfortable afternoon wondering what in Heaven's name I was doing in Jamaica.

Promptly at six o'clock, as we had arranged, Hilda telephoned to me to say that she would come to the hotel after dinner. "Pedro wants to meet you. He suggests showing you round a bit, if the idea appeals to you," she told me.

I said that it appealed to me greatly.

"Pedro," Hilda explained to me when we met, "knows everyone on the Island, but he doesn't know the Gerts. He's been to the Forest House once and they gave him a damned good dinner."

"Damned good!" Pedro laughed, displaying a lot of very white teeth. He was a swarthy handsome man, somewhat extravagantly dressed, who spoke fluent English with a strong Latin-American accent. I liked him instantly.

He swept me into his large American car and, driving as if pursued by all the devils from Hell, he carried me off by tortuous roads into the mountains, to an enchanted world where orchids flowered in the trees and fireflies flashed. Amongst other places that night, we called at the Blue Mountain Inn, that nestles against the mountainside, above a rushing stream, some two thousand feet above the sea, where I immediately determined that I would stay to escape the infernal heat of Kingston.

Over the drinks at the Inn, Hilda asked if she might tell Pedro why I was in Jamaica.

"He's a wonderful person," she said, "and damned clever. You mustn't be fooled by the play-boy exterior. I feel that he can be useful to you."

"If you feel that, tell him," I said. "To-morrow, before moving up here, I intend meeting the Gerts. I suggest that you and Pedro dine with me here so that I can tell you how I got on."

"We'll be here," Hilda said. "I can't wait to hear all about that meeting."

As they dropped me at the Myrtle Bank, Hilda said: "On second thoughts, I'll telephone you round about four o'clock, just to make sure you're still with us!"

"And if I'm not?" I laughed.

"I'll get out my little gun," she said.

I felt suddenly very wide awake and disinclined to go to bed. So I walked out into the hotel garden and ordered a drink and sat listening to the Calypso band. Then, for no reason that I can explain, I was possessed by the desire to have a look at the Forest House Hotel.

I told the waiter to call me a taxi while I finished my drink.

"I want you to stop just short of the hotel and wait for me," I explained to the driver.

"No dancing there, sare," he said, rolling his eyes stupidly. "No girls!"

"I don't want to dance and I don't want a girl," I told him, marvelling at the single-mindedness of these Island people. "I want you to drive me near to the hotel and then wait for me."

"Okay, sare," he said sulkily, "I understand."

I sat back in a corner of the taxi, experiencing a growing sense of excitement as I drove out of the town.

"How far is it?" I asked the driver.

"Five mile. Maybe six," he answered, so that I knew that he planned to cheat me over the fare.

After ten minutes driving he pulled up under a large sign that announced the Forest House Hotel and Restaurant.

"The place you're looking for is right up the road there. I can drive you right to the door," he said.

"You will do no such thing," I told him firmly. "Just wait here until I come back and don't start hooting that damned horn of yours after a couple of minutes," I added fiercely.

"Okay, sare," he grinned. "I understand, sare." I felt sure that he suspected me of an assignation with some dusky chambermaid.

In the brilliant moonlight my shadow stalked before me up the country road that led to the hotel. In a nearby garden, a dog bayed the moon so mournfully that I felt a chill down my spine and instinctively quickened my pace. I forced myself to stop and light a cigarette. As I stood searching for my lighter, the dog stopped baying, and in the utter silence I could hear only the pounding of my own heart. A bat swept squeaking close to my head, attracted by the whiteness

of my hair in the moonlight or the flame of my lighter. I walked slowly on. By the gate of the hotel I halted again in the shadow of a great flowering tree that filled the air with a sickly sweet scent.

The hotel was in darkness. No single light burned in any of its windows. I tried the gate, but it creaked hideously on its unoiled hinges, filling the night with sound, so that I started back in horror. Somewhere a dog began barking again. Hastily I crushed out my cigarette and drew back further into the shadow of the trees. I had not the slightest idea why I had come here or to what purpose. But the place held such an irresistible fascination for me that I could not leave it until I had looked it over more thoroughly. Feeling like an ageing and somewhat diminutive Bulldog Drummond, I moved stealthily round towards the back of the buildings and found myself staring through the wide-open doors of an empty garage. I almost cried out in my alarm for that garage looked so newly abandoned that I felt suddenly convinced that the Gerts had already fled. I do not think I have ever been more sure of anything. I began to tremble with rage, cursing myself for being every kind of a fool for letting Peter know that I was in Jamaica through that ostentatious message about Stuart. I should have known better than to take such a chance.

I sat down on the grass at the side of the road, feeling sick. What could I say to Stuart? How to explain that I had travelled all those thousands of miles at his paper's expense just to make a hopeless mess of everything at the end of it?

"You bloody, bloody fool!" I muttered to myself and hot tears of impotent rage burnt my eyes.

Then the sound of an approaching car startled me to my senses and sent me scuttling up the road away from the hotel. I saw the loom of its headlights advancing down the main road and crouched further into the

hedge as it turned the corner where my taxi stood waiting. As the car sped towards me, I thought joyously that perhaps after all the Gerts had not gone. But it roared on past me, setting the fallen leaves dancing, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

I walked back down the road to my taxi. The driver had fallen asleep over the steering wheel and it relieved my feelings to prod him awake.

"Back to the Myrtle Bank," I told him, "and get a move on. I want a drink."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I SAT UP for a long time that night drinking rum in the garden of the Myrtle Bank . . . But I did not get drunk. I drank only because I knew that I would not be able to sleep and to go to bed simply to lie awake wondering whether the Gerts had fled seemed waste of time. I only wanted the hours to pass until I could once again walk down Harbour Street and see if Peter was sitting as usual at his counter. But, at last, when I was told by the sleepy waiter that the barman had closed the bar, I went to bed and slept soundly. I awoke to find the room filled with sunlight and, looking at my watch, saw that it was nearly ten o'clock. I dressed hurriedly, and, without waiting to breakfast, almost ran down the street.

Peter was there all right. I stood as conspicuously as possible immediately across the road. An elderly man in a panama hat and a light grey suit was talking to Peter, who was consulting a time-table.

Then Peter looked up and saw me. He gave no sign that he had recognised me, but hastily hid his face behind the sheet of paper he was studying. I stood just where I was, trying not to laugh and wondering how the devil he was managing to deal with his customer.

After a few minutes, I walked back to the hotel.

"Have you a Mr. Peter Gert working in your main office?" I asked the girl at the B.O.A.C. desk.

"Yes," she said, looking surprised. "Do you know him?" She was a pert little creature, inclined to ogle her elderly customers.

"He's an old friend of mine," I said. "But I had no idea that he was in Jamaica," I added for I felt pretty certain that Peter would extract from her a detailed report of our conversation. "I've known him for many years, and his father and mother also. Do you happen to know if they, too, are in Jamaica?"

"They own an hotel here. . . The Forest. Nothing like this—quite a small place," she said disparagingly.

"How interesting," I said. "I wonder if you would be so kind as to get Mr. Gert on the telephone for me?"

"Surely, the name's Heckstall-Smith, isn't it?" she asked, airing her efficiency. "Peter, there's a friend of yours here," she said to my delight. "He's on the line now," she told me, passing the receiver across the desk.

"Hullo," I heard Peter say, and his voice trembled. Before I could speak, he said with terrible urgency. "I'm coming right over to your hotel."

"No," I told him, "meet me at the Balcony Inn in five minutes."

"Okay," he said.

The Balcony Inn was a charming bar and restaurant a few doors down the street from the Myrtle Bank where I intended that Peter should sit waiting for me.

"Thank you," I said to the girl and walked out of the hotel.

I took a sadistic pleasure in keeping Peter waiting for the better part of a quarter of an hour before joining him.

In the doorway, I paused to take off my sun-glasses. Peter was sitting on the edge of his chair at a corner table, watching the door. He jumped up as I entered. Then, for a second, he hesitated as if uncertain what to do. Since I did not smile or give any sign of greeting, I believe that he thought I was going to hit him. In

fact, I am sure that he did, for he recoiled as I came into the room.

I struggled with a wave of revulsion against him that threatened to overwhelm me. "I cannot—I simply cannot shake hands with him," I thought.

Then, as though I was hearing it from a great distance, I listened to his voice saying: "Tony, I just can't believe this is true!" He gave a sickly sort of laugh. "I've often dreamt of this moment."

So help me, God, that was exactly what he said as he held out his hand to me.

To avoid taking it, I muttered something fatuous about the heat, mopping my face with my handkerchief.

Then I said: "How are you? Have a drink?" He seemed to go limp with relief for he sat down rather suddenly. He had become grossly fat. His red neck bulged over his collar. Little drops of sweat gleamed on his freckled forehead and formed a glistening moustache along his upper lip that twitched absurdly. The spasms of his tic seemed to be more frequent and violent. But, of course, his self-assurance had deserted him and his nerves were all to blazes.

"The drinks are on me," he said ingratiatingly and fumbled in his hip-pocket for his wallet.

"On the contrary, they're on me," I said firmly, for I was determined that he should not feel too quickly at ease. Even if I had a part to play, there was no reason why I should overplay it.

"How the hell did you know that I was here?" he said, stammering slightly.

I paid the barman for the drinks before answering. "I thought that I recognised you this morning as I passed your office," I said casually. "Then I wasn't sure, so I asked the girl at the desk in my hotel."

"But, Tony, what are you doing here?" His hand shook as he took the glass I held out to him. His bewilderment was genuine.

"Just taking a trip," I said, sitting down opposite to him. "I wrote a book and made some money and came into a little more besides, so I thought I'd have a holiday," I said and was surprised how easily I was able to lie. Then I said that the girl in the hotel had told me that Jupie and Clari were in Jamaica, adding that I would like to see them.

"Jupie owns an hotel," Peter told me.

"So the girl told me," I explained. "Ring him up and tell him I'm here. I'd like to have luncheon with them."

"I will in a moment," Peter said. "But first I must talk to you. I haven't much time off from the office."

"Don't you go home to luncheon?" I asked.

"No, I haven't time," he answered. He lent forward and put his hand on my arm. "Tony, what happened to you?"

"I went to prison," I told him bluntly.

His face twitched. He did not seem to know quite what to say.

"I heard that you had," he said at last.

"How?"

"Jackie wrote to me."

Jackie, I remembered, was a South African friend of his, who lived somewhere in England.

"Tony, I didn't dare write to you. I wanted to write to you but I was scared to. I was scared of making things worse for you. But I wanted to write."

"You couldn't have written. You didn't know my address."

"I could have found out through Jackie. But I didn't dare . . ."

"I understand . . ."

"I wonder if you really do? We had to go, Tony. Things went wrong. Jupie thinks that Fritz did something none of us know about in London and because of that the police got on to us. So we had to go."

Nothing could have sounded less convincing or more shallow.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"To Rio. We had to. There was nothing else we could do. You know that we wouldn't have left you otherwise? You must know that?"

His pleading manner nauseated me and I turned away for fear that he should recognise my disgust.

"Tony, you do believe me?"

"Would it matter very much now if I didn't?" The moment I had asked the question, I regretted it. "Peter, what's past, is past," I added quickly.

"Only you could say that." He gave me a wan smile, but his relief was obvious.

"Tell me what happened after you left?"

"We went to Rio and things were going fine when the Italians started extradition proceedings against us."

"Why, for God's sake?" I asked.

Peter laughed. "The old man thought you had something to do with that."

"I!" This time I had no need to feign astonishment.

"Yes, you. You know what crazy ideas he gets into his head. Of course, I knew it wasn't anything to do with you. I knew you'd never play a low-down trick like that on us. I told Jupie so."

"Thank you," I said, trying not to laugh. "But I don't understand why the Italians wanted to extradite you?"

"Because of that income tax they insisted that Jupie owed. You remember, surely?"

"Yes, yes, of course, I do. But, go on——"

"Tony, they put us in gaol. And we stayed in a Brazilian gaol for sixty days."

"Roughly three hundred days less than I spent," I said, for the dig was irresistible.

"But this was a Brazilian gaol," Peter repeated, "and even you have no conception of what that is

like. It was murder. The old man and I were shut up in the same cell most of the time and I thought I would go mad. Day after day, he did nothing but pace up and down that bloody cell, shouting and yelling at me in German. Christ, what I suffered!"

He was launched now upon a sea of self-pity and I sat sipping my drink and listening to the whole story of his imprisonment, regretting only that it had lasted a paltry sixty days. Eventually, as far as I was able to gather from his confused account, they had managed to bribe their way out and, before the extradition order was granted, they had escaped in a chartered plane to Montevideo.

"We had no visa and, no papers," Peter said, warming to the adventure and becoming his old boastful self, "but I literally talked my way into that country. I said we were on our way to Trinidad and that our plane had made a forced landing. Thank God, by then, I spoke perfect Portuguese as that saved our lives."

I remarked that I imagined that he had money, as well, and he realised that his story was running away with him.

"The business in Rio with the police and the lawyers and the rest of it, had pretty well ruined us," he added, hastily.

"But you had done well in Rio?" I asked the question casually, and Peter fell for it.

"I wish you could have seen the car I bought there. And the little apartment I fixed up for myself," he bragged.

"I wish that I could have done," I said. He glanced at me suspiciously.

"I lost the lot, thanks to those bloody Italians. And now look at me! A clerk with B.O.A.C.! And the old people running a little hotel!" He dismissed the

family's change of fortune with a brave little laugh and a shrug of his shoulders.

"Talking of the old people," I said, "go and ring them up now."

"Now?" Peter hesitated.

"Why not?"

"I doubt if they'll be in. Why not come to dinner this evening? Then we can all be together," he suggested.

I told him that I was engaged for dinner and added that I would drive out to the Forest Hotel on the off-chance that Jupie and Clari would be at home. I was suddenly aware that Peter did not want me to see Jupie until he had seen him. Since he had told me that he did not go home to luncheon, I was quite determined that nothing would stop me going there immediately. I was quite certain also that both Jupie and Clari were at home.

"Don't bother to telephone," I said, "I'll take a taxi and go there. It'll give them a nice surprise!"

Peter had gone a little white.

"Now I come to think of it, I believe the old boy's leaving for Trinidad on business this afternoon," he said. "He'll be gone about a couple of weeks. How long are you staying here?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "But if Jupie's going away, I must see him before he goes."

Peter looked at his watch. "I simply must get back to my office. I'll phone Jupie from there. If he's in he may send the car for you. I'll ring you in ten minutes at your hotel," he added.

"Don't bother, because I shall go there anyway," I said. "You see, I'm moving up to the Blue Mountain Inn this evening for a few days. I want to get out of this heat," I added.

Peter looked puzzled. "But we'll meet again?"

"Of course, we will," I assured him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

JUPIE AND CLARI, with the two dachshunds running at their heels, came down the garden path, between the flower-beds, to meet me. They were expecting me for Peter had telephoned them and Jupie had sent his car, driven by a coloured chauffeur, to fetch me.

The old man wore a silk shirt open at the neck and a panama hat and came towards me holding out his arms. He had not changed in the least since I had last seen him. But in the frail, emaciated old lady who walked a little behind him, I scarcely recognised Clari. Now she looked exactly like a witch.

"Toni! I believe that I am dreaming!" Jupie cried.

I felt strangely moved. There was a lump in my throat and I could not speak. Yet I knew perfectly well that every detail of this meeting had been carefully planned, probably rehearsed even. I knew that far from being pleased to see me, they would have gone to any lengths to avoid ever seeing me again. I knew that neither of them cared what had become of me. They did not care that they had ruined me financially as well as socially, or that because of them I had gone to prison. They would not have given a damn if I had committed suicide. The chances were, they would have read the news of my death with feelings of relief. Even now, as Jupie held out his arms to me and Clari stood there with tears in her eyes, they were inwardly seething with suspicion and distrust because I had

come to see them. They probably feared that, at last, retribution had caught up with them and were wondering how to escape it.

Yet, in spite of knowing all this, for some inexplicable reason, I was deeply moved, so that I just stood there in the gateway looking from one to the other of them.

Only when Clari tried to kiss me did I recover my senses, for I suddenly remembered the last time that she had kissed me in the hall of the Ritz. "You must trust Jupie," she had said.

I drew away from her. "Don't kiss me, I'm all sweaty," I laughed, and the moment was over.

They led me to the bar.

"This is a moment for celebration," Jupie said, clapping his hands for the barman. "Haf vot you vish. Everything vot is here is yours!"

"Toni, haf un champagne cocktail mit French champagne," Clari said.

It was a relief that the hospitality was overdone.

"There is much vot ve must speak about, Toni," Jupie said, patting my knee. "You vill stay for luncheon und ve vill give you something special, no?"

"I would love to," I said.

When the waiter brought the drinks, he raised his glass to me. Both of them, I felt, were watching me closely.

"Pater has told you a little of vot happened?" Jupie asked.

"A little," I said guardedly.

"I tried everything to get in touch mit you," Jupie began. "I cabled to this friend of yours mit the chemical business in New York—not vonce but several times."

"You mean you cabled to George?" I asked.

"Yes. Did he not tell you so?"

I shook my head. Jupie frowned. "I haf the copies of the cables vot I can show to you."

Anyone, I thought could have those. But I said: "Please do not bother."

"I made Pater telephone from Rio to that friend of his from South Africa vot is in London. I haf forgotten his name. Boot Pater telephoned to him that he was to find you und to tell you that you vere to com immediately to me in Brazil. Did Pater not tell you that?"

I took a drink before answering. "Yes, yes, of course, he did," I said quickly, for I realised that Peter probably had not had time fully to report all that we had talked about.

"Und this boy did not contact you?" Jupie pressed.

Again I shook my head and he shrugged his great shoulders in a gesture of despair. "Und there vos a ticket for you paid by me to Rio," he said, bowing his head in regret.

"Jupie, why tell you all these things to Toni?" Clari asked almost sharply.

"I vont that he should know that I did not desert him," he answered. But he took the hint and began to tell me, as Peter had done, that it was because of Fritz that he had been forced to leave London so suddenly. But what Fritz was supposed to have done, I could not find out, because, when I pressed the point, Jupie became vague. I knew, he said, how he had always worried about the company Fritz kept, and he added, rather sorrowfully, that Fritz was always a thorn in his flesh. Then he started talking about what happened in Rio. His story tallied fairly well with Peter's, except that Jupie blamed the partners he had left behind in Florence for being responsible for the extradition proceedings that had been taken against him.

"After I haf gone, they must haf got up to tricks und used my name," he explained quite shamelessly.

"I see," I said.

"Boot, Toni, you haf no idea how ve haf suffered in that prison," he said.

"Look you at me," Clari chimed in. "See vot I haf become und you vill know vot ve haf suffered. Oh, Toni, Toni, you vill never know!" she wailed.

Jupie looked at her and spoke quite sharply. "That is enough," he said. "Toni do not vont to listen to all that." I suspected that he had grown a little tired of Clari's sufferings for, after all, she had not been to gaol. She was the only one of us that had not, Jupie's tone inferred, yet she did the most grumbling.

By now, my head was beginning to ache and I was growing weary of listening to all the lies and excuses and, even if Clari had poisoned the speciality she had prepared for me, I wanted my luncheon. Besides, I had drunk several champagne cocktails without having had breakfast, and it was essential that I should not get tipsy.

I was greatly relieved, therefore, when the Indian waiter announced that luncheon was served.

Whether by design or coincidence, I found myself eating the same dishes that I had eaten on that first evening that I had dined with Jupie and Clari at their villa in Florence, so that I remarked the fact and Clari gave my hand a secret squeeze that made me shudder.

We were alone in the dining-room, except for a sad-looking old Englishman, who Jupie told me was his only guest. He explained that he had rented the hotel for two years.

"It is just an experiment," he said. "Und now all the small hoteliers vish me to form an association to make propaganda for them throughout the Caribbean

so that they will have more clients. That is why I go now to Trinidad," he added.

This, I thought, was the old Jupie talking once more. The Jupie whose brain was seething with plans and schemes for making money. But in the light of what I knew now, I felt a pang of sympathy for all those small hoteliers he mentioned so casually. How much longer, I reflected, would any of them own their hotels once Jupie had formed his association?

"I am sad that I go away as soon as you arrive, Toni," Jupie said. "But you must come here as my guest for as long as you are in Jamaica."

"Send now for Toni's luggage from his hotel," Clari said so quickly that I sensed that it was all part of the plot that I should stay with them. "It is no reason that he should waste money at that Myrtle Bank. Send now the chauffeur for his things, Jupie," she repeated.

I felt that I was being driven into a corner and with a sense of panic remembered all the notes for the book that I was writing that were in my dispatch case.

"I can't come," I explained. "I've arranged to go up to the mountains this afternoon. I have people meeting me there for dinner."

"Bring you them here instead," Clari said. "I will give them a so much better dinner."

"Of that I have no doubt, but I don't know their telephone number. In fact, I don't think they're on the telephone," I lied desperately. Then to my immediate regret, I said that I would come to stay in a day or two, after I had refreshed myself with mountain air.

"And you will stay until my return?" Jupie asked.

"Only for a few days," I told him. "I have to get back to London."

"Then I shall not see you, for I will be away," he said sadly.

I do not know why, but I knew that Jupie would stay away from the Island until he was sure that I had gone. I was as certain of that as I was that the old man did not believe that mere chance had brought me to Jamaica.

As I said good-bye to him and repeated my promise to Clari that I would come to stay, I told myself that while I had definitely fooled Peter and possibly hoodwinked Clari, I had not deceived Jupie for a single minute.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I WENT TO the Blue Mountain Inn and, that same evening, Hilda and Pedro dined with me at a candlelit table by the open windows of the dining-room that overlooked the mountain stream. We ate crayfish and fillets of steaks, grilled over a wood fire, and drank Rhine wine, while J made them laugh about the Gerts.

But Pedro stopped laughing and said suddenly: "Why should these people get away with it all the time? Why should they be living here in Jamaica in comfort? This is a British Possession and they are criminals with warrants out against them. Tell me why this should be?"

"I can't tell you, Pedro," I said. "I wish I could. I wish that I, too, knew the answers to those questions of yours."

Hilda sat with her chin resting elegantly in her pink-tipped hands. "It doesn't make sense," she said, "it's all balls!" And because that succinctly summed up the case, we all laughed again.

It did not make sense to me either that Jupie, Clari and Peter were, to all intents and purposes, respected citizens in the Island, and the more I thought about it during those next two days that I spent up in the mountains writing long letters home to Stuart Campbell and Charles Fry, reporting my activities, the less I could understand it.

I simply did not believe that the Home Office was

unaware that the Gerts had settled in Jamaica. It was inconceivable that the Italian police knew all about the Gerts movements while our own police remained ignorant. If our police did know, had they passed on to the local authorities any information about the Gerts? I felt tempted to make inquiries, but doubted that I had the right to do so. Yet it seemed to me intolerable that at this very moment Jupie was probably planning to defraud other innocent victims and that apparently no one was making the slightest effort to prevent him.

As I sat in the shade of the verandah typing my letters, I longed publicly to denounce the Gerts. Yet I knew that I could not. All that I could do was to continue slowly and with patience to assemble my facts as, indeed, I was doing, and then set them down on paper. My letters finished, I turned to my notes. The yellow-covered book containing them, was becoming dog-eared and tattered for it had travelled with me now half-way round the world. In it were pasted faded newspaper cuttings that reported my trial, and amongst them that one headed, "Hunt for King of Fraud", that so concisely outlined the Gerts' record of crime.

I worked long and late bringing my notes up to date. Then I made a neat parcel of them. The following morning, before going to the Forest Hotel, I delivered the parcel into Hilda's safe-keeping.

"Will you take care of this?" I asked. "It contains some papers. Nothing incriminating. Merely some facts about my hosts that I wouldn't care for them to read. It would seem almost impertinent to take them with me."

"Besides being damned stupid," Hilda laughed. "Come out in the garden and have a farewell rum."

"I'm not sure that I care for that word farewell," I told her, "but I'll accept the rum." Hilda's

concoctions made from rum and fresh limes, I am sure, are without equals anywhere in the Caribbean.

"I shall find an excuse to telephone you every morning," she said, "and I couldn't care less if old Mother Gert thinks I'm trying to make you," she added bawdily.

Hilda was true to her word. Faithfully, she telephoned to me each morning, so that Peter asked: "Who's the girl-friend?"

"She travelled out with me," I said casually.

"Well, you seem to have made quite an impression," he laughed.

Peter was at home all day now, for two days after I had arrived to stay, he had come back one evening and told Clari and me he had lost his job with B.O.A.C. For one moment, his news startled me as I wondered if by any possible chance the Minister of Justice in Rome had started the ball rolling again or whether Scotland Yard had, at last, taken some action. But when I asked him why he had been sacked, Peter assured me that the local office was overstaffed, and as its most junior member, it was inevitable that he should be the first to be dismissed.

Clari seemed almost pleased at Peter's news.

"Now you can be more at home und I shall not be all the time alone mit only the servants," she said.

Peter looked at me and grimaced. The fact that he was away not only all day, but went out most evenings as well, was a bone of contention between them. Clari never tired of complaining of her loneliness. Sooner or later, when we were together, she always brought the conversation back to the subject of Peter's selfishness.

"He is now vorse than ever, Toni," she would moan. "You remind you how it vos mit him in Toronto und before in Florence? Vell, now it is even vorse. Sometimes, I think that he hates me."

In saying that he hated her, Clari was overstating the case. At the same time, I think that Peter now genuinely disliked his mother and I admit not without reason, for she nagged him ceaselessly. Nothing that he could do for her seemed to please her. Had I been capable of any such feeling for him, I would have been sorry for him. For, especially after he had lost his job, Peter lead a dog's life with Clari. Whenever he tried to escape from her, she made a tearful scene, and as often as he stayed at home, he quarrelled violently with her. Clari was forever criticising him, remarking spitefully on his increasing weight, drawing attention to his tic, or reprimanding him for his bad manners as though he was still a child.

Sometimes, a few of Peter's friends would come to the bar of the hotel in the evening. Their arrival was the signal for Clari to descend upon the bar and sit like an angry ghoul in the shadows, killing conviviality by her silence.

"Yet she grumbles because the bar doesn't pay!" Peter cried despairingly.

When he told her brutally that her presence in the bar was bad for trade, she laughed maliciously and said: "Your friends only drink for vot you pay!"

I confess that I found satisfaction in the wretchedness of the life that Clari and Peter lived together. I admit without the least shame that I went out of my way to foster it. During the few days that I stayed at the Forest House, I behaved like a hypocrite and a trouble-maker. I listened with sympathy to all their complaints about each other and then faithfully repeated them. I always took sides in their quarrels. More often than not I supported Clari because I knew that hers was the stronger character and therefore capable of causing greater unhappiness. I knew, too, that Peter was a moral coward and that however desperately he might want to leave Clari alone in the

evenings, he did not dare to do so in the face of my disapproval.

I listened with delight, too, to Clari's stories of Jupie's increasing ill-temper; stories that were confirmed by Peter. I relished the fact that the hotel was always empty. For while I did not doubt that Jupie had some very good reason for running it even at a loss, it pleased me to think that he was losing money. Besides, I knew that the atmosphere of desolation that pervaded the place, depressed both Peter and Clari. I knew from my experience as a barman how soul-destroying it is to sit waiting for customers who do not turn up.

I never discovered the truth about the Gerts financial position. Of course, both Peter and Clari were at pains to convince me that times were hard for them.

"God knows what will happen if things don't improve," Peter told me one day. "I only hope the old man can whip up some business in Trinidad."

"Do you think he will?" I asked, simply to encourage him to go on talking.

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he said. "He paid quite a price for this dump and he'll never get his money back unless we can fill it." I remembered that Jupie had told me that he had only taken a lease of the hotel for two years. But I did not mention the point to Peter. I thought, however, that Jupie's story was the more likely one since I now understood the old man's distaste for permanent residences.

While I could not be sure, I felt that the whole family was, so to speak, marking time. While they still owned a big chauffeur-driven American car, ate hugely and retained a larger staff than was necessary, they did not live as lavishly as they had done, for instance, in Florence or even London. It was strange, too, that Peter was for ever stressing the necessity of

finding another job, as was also the fact that he had no car of his own.

I never came any nearer to the solution of the puzzle of why the Gerts were living as they were. Neither Peter or Clari ever talked about the future except in a nebulous sort of way. Peter said often enough that he longed for his independence. But I had heard that story too many times before to credit it. Clari yearned sometimes for the farm in South-West Africa and at others for the Vienna coffee-houses. Such yearnings were but nostalgic dreams, one felt, that were not to be taken seriously. But they quite obviously avoided the future. If I brought up the subject, they talked round it and, eventually, away from it, retreating into the past, as if for safety.

Both of them—like all people whose lives are unhappy—seemed happiest re-living the past. They did not hark back to our times together in London, fearing, I suppose, into what pitfalls memories of that city might lead them. But Clari, in particular, loved to talk about Florence and Grace Lake.

It was while chatting of the latter place one morning on the verandah, that Clari showed me the brooch she was wearing. It was an amethyst engraved with the family blazon, surrounded by diamonds. Peter, she said, had given it to her on her last birthday; her sixty-fourth.

“Do you remember the stone, Toni?” she asked.

I looked at it more closely. It was the stone from that ring that Peter had given to Willie.

I remember at that moment the Indian waiter came out of the dining-room, screwing up his eyes against the blinding sunlight. He walked with feline grace along the gravel path and announced that luncheon was served.

Clari had promised me a Vienna Schnitzel. She had prepared it herself.

"It vill be goot," she told me. "I make mit it the special sauce vot you like. Com, ve vill eat."

She took my arm and we walked slowly together across the lawn. The two dachshunds ran ahead, hunting in the flower beds and Clari called them to heel.

"Remember you the liddle dog in Florence?" she smiled.

"Indeed I do. I wonder what has happened to it?" I asked.

Clari shrugged her shoulders.

"Who vood know after so long time."

There was no trace of feeling in her voice. No sound of regret. For the old woman leaning on my arm had lived for too long in a world without compassion.